

The Best Person for the Job:
An investigation into the principal selection process in
Tasmanian government schools

by

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Declaration of originality

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Abstract

Despite the crucial role that principals play, numbers of applicants for principalship vacancies are said to be declining, and one of the reasons for this is the process used to select principals. There is a small, but increasing body of research into people's perceptions of principal selection processes, but almost none in the Tasmanian context. This study aims to fill this void in the research.

This research investigates the perceptions of a group of people involved in the selection process for principals in the state of Tasmania, Australia. In particular, it examines those factors that were considered to be positive about the process and those that were considered to be negative. It seeks to answer three questions:

- what are the views on those factors of participants in the principal selection process that exists in the Tasmania Department of Education?
- what effects does participation in the process have on participants themselves?
- what are the implications for the system (Department of Education)?

In its use of semi-structured interviews as the data-gathering instrument, this study facilitates an in-depth exploration of the issue with participants. In doing so, it is anticipated that the study will add to the existing knowledge of peoples' perceptions of principalship selection, with its links to declining number of principalship applicants. This study goes further, in that it specifically investigates the Tasmanian context, adding to the very limited information that exists on the current situation. It provides data that could help to shape future principal selection processes, which in turn may address the issue of declining numbers of people applying for principalship positions. Finally, it offers information to guide further research into making the selection process more effective.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Peter, for his unfailing support in so many ways; in particular, for his belief that I could do this, and his much-needed encouragement during those times when I didn't share that belief.

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Table of contents

Declaration of originality.....	ii
Statement of authority of access.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Table of contents	vii
List of tables.....	xii
List of diagrams.....	xiii
 Chapter One: Introduction	 1
1.1 Formulation of the research focus.....	3
1.2 Significance of the study	4
1.3 Limitations of the study	5
1.4 Definition of terms	6
1.5 Organisation of the study	7
 Chapter Two: Literature Review	 8
2.1 The role of the principal.....	8
2.1.1 Overview of literature related to the impact of aspects of the role of the principal	13
2.2 Concern over the declining numbers of applicants for principalship vacancies	15
2.2.1 International views on numbers of principalship applicants	15
2.2.2 National views on numbers of principalship applicants.....	19
2.2.3 Overview of literature related to declining numbers of principalship applicants	21
2.3 Reasons for declining numbers.....	23
2.3.1 The stressful nature of the job	23
2.3.2 The impact on personal and family life	24
2.3.3 The loss of close relationships with staff and students	25
2.3.4 Salary concerns.....	25

2.3.5	Gender issues	26
2.3.6	The impact of contextual issues	26
2.3.7	Overview of literature related to reasons for declining number of applicants	27
2.4	Dissatisfaction with principalship selection processes	29
2.4.1	Loss of confidence in the merit principle	29
2.4.2	'Known' applicants are advantaged	30
2.4.3	The influence of the superintendent	30
2.4.4	The cost of the process	31
2.4.5	The ineffectiveness of the process	31
2.4.6	Ineffective feedback	32
2.4.7	Inconsistency of the process	32
2.4.8	Panel competency concerns	33
2.4.9	Overview of literature related to dissatisfaction with principalship selection processes	34
2.5	Personnel selection techniques - effectiveness	36
2.5.1	Assessment centres	37
2.5.2	Applications	38
2.5.3	Interviews	39
2.5.4	References	40
2.5.5	A comparison of methods	40
2.5.6	Overview of literature related to effectiveness of selection techniques	41
2.6	Personnel selection techniques - effects	42
2.6.1	Elements of a process that impact positively on applicants	43
2.6.2	Justice issues	43
2.6.3	Impact of success versus non-success	43
2.6.4	How candidates feel they are treated	44
2.6.5	Relationship between the selection process and the job	44
2.6.6	Provision of effective feedback	44
2.6.7	Involvement in the process	45
2.6.8	Transparency of the process	45
2.6.9	Overview of literature related to effects of selection techniques	45
2.7	Examples of principalship selection practices	47
2.7.1	Australia	47

2.7.2	United States of America	50
2.7.3	Overview of literature related to principal selection practices	55
2.8	Principal selection in Tasmania	56
2.9	Summary	57

Chapter Three: Research Methodology61

3.1	Research design	61
3.1.1	Considerations underpinning the research	61
3.1.2	Quantitative or qualitative research?	62
3.1.3	Interviews as the method of data-collection	63
3.1.4	The interview schedule	66
3.2	The role of the researcher	68
3.3	Ethical issues	69
3.3.1	Consequences of participation	70
3.3.2	Informed consent	71
3.3.3	Confidentiality	72
3.4	Credibility of the research	73
3.5	Participant overview	75
3.6	Analysis of the data	78
3.7	Summary	80

Chapter Four: Results81

4.1	Effectiveness	82
4.1.1	The effectiveness/application dimension	82
4.1.2	The effectiveness/interview dimension	97
4.1.3	The effectiveness/verification dimension	113
4.1.4	The effectiveness/post-selection counselling dimension	128
4.1.5	The effectiveness/process as a whole dimension	134
4.1.6	Summary of effectiveness comments	139
4.2	Fairness	140
4.2.1	The fairness/application dimension	140
4.2.2	The fairness/interview dimension	144
4.2.3	The fairness/verification dimension	147
4.2.4	The fairness/post-selection counselling dimension	147

4.2.5	The fairness/process as a whole dimension	147
4.2.6	Summary of fairness comments	154
4.3	Cost.....	154
4.3.1	The cost/financial cost dimension	154
4.3.2	The cost/cost for applicants dimension	155
4.3.3	The cost/cost for panel members dimension	158
4.3.4	The cost/cost for the system dimension.....	160
4.3.5	Summary of cost comments	164
4.4	Summary of results	164
Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations		166
5.1	Introduction	166
5.1.1	Themes.....	166
5.1.2	Issues	167
5.2	Conclusions	171
5.2.1	The issue of word limits	172
5.2.2	Information gathering about an applicant's performance	173
5.2.3	The issue of post-selection counselling	173
5.2.4	The issue of consistency	174
5.2.5	Veracity of the process	175
5.2.6	Further research into selection processes	176
5.2.7	A support document	177
5.2.8	Summary of conclusions.....	180
5.3	Recommendations for further research.....	180
5.4	Final thoughts	182
References		183
Appendices		200
Appendix A: Cover Sheet.....		200
Appendix B: Fairfax County Feedback Invitation		202
Appendix C: Letter to Potential Applicants.....		204
Appendix D: Informed Consent Form.....		208
Appendix E: Version of promotion application with names of verifiers.....		210

Appendix F: Guidelines for applicants for promotion positions (Tasmanian Department of Education).....	214
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List of tables

Table 1: Literature related to the impact of aspects of the role of the principal ...	14
Table 2: Literature related to decline in numbers of principalship applicants	22
Table 3: Literature related to reasons for decline in numbers of principalship applicants.....	28
Table 4: Literature related to specific concerns regarding the principal selection process	35
Table 5: Overview of positives and negatives of various personnel selection methodologies	42
Table 6: Literature regarding the effects of personnel selection methodologies on participants	46
Table 7: Overview of various principalship selection methodologies	56
Table 8: Major themes in the literature related to principalship selection	58
Table 9: Overview of interview schedule.....	68
Table 10: Numerical overview of thematic comments.....	81
Table 11: Overview of effectiveness/application comments.....	97
Table 12: Overview of effectiveness/interview comments.....	113
Table 13: Overview of effectiveness/verification comments.....	128
Table 14: Overview of effectiveness/post-selection counselling comments	134
Table 15: Overview of effectiveness/process as a whole comments	139
Table 16: Overview of fairness/application comments	143
Table 17: Overview of fairness/interview comments	147
Table 18: Overview of fairness/process as a whole comments	153
Table 19: Overview of cost comments	164
Table 20: Overview of degree of positive/negative comments on the effectiveness and fairness dimensions	165
Table 21: Overview of degree of positive/negative comments on the cost dimension	165
Table 22: Overview of issues identified in this research investigation.....	171
Table 23: Overview of conclusions	180

List of diagrams

Figure 1: Connections between elements of the literature review.....	59
Figure 2: Elements of effective principalship selection.....	178
Figure 3: Support document for selection process.....	179

Chapter One: Introduction

The challenge for research in the future is to illuminate how applicants are impacted by organisational recruitment and selection procedures, how they reach decisions on whether or not to remain a candidate, and how this might affect their future job-related motivational states and expectations ... we believe that the first challenge for both researchers and practitioners consists of demonstrating that applicant perceptions really matter. In other words, more research should be devoted to prove that applicant perceptions have practical ramifications for organisations. (Anderson, Lievens, van Dam and Ryan 2004:494)

Anderson et al. propose that the perceptions of participants in a selection process are important, and that these have implications for the organisations undertaking the processes. While they refer to personnel selection generally, this research takes that focus and locates it more specifically – investigating the perceptions of a group of people engaged in principalship selection processes in the Tasmanian Department of Education, and looks at implications that these perceptions might have.

In examining principalship selection, it is important that the researcher demonstrate why this is a worthwhile endeavour. The principal is a significant factor in the creation and sustenance of good schools (eg: Bottoms, O'Neill, Fry and Hill 2003; National Conference of State Legislators 2002; Teske and Schneider 1999), in improving student learning (eg: Bell, Bolam and Cubillo 2003; Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson and Wahlstrom 2004; Mulford 2005; NCSL 2002) and in high performing schools (eg: Dinham 2004; Mulford and Silins 2003; Sebring and Bryk 2000). It follows that, given the importance of the role of the principal, it is desirable to have good numbers of high quality applicants applying for principalship vacancies.

Over the past few years, there has been a growing body of literature, both internationally (eg: Draper and McMichael 1998; Rayfield and Diamantes 2003; Wallace Foundation 2003) and nationally (eg: Blackmore and Barty 2004; Gronn and Lacey 2005a, 2005b; Gronn and Rawlings-Saenei 2003;) related to the issue of diminishing fields of applicants for principalship vacancies. Reasons for this decline have been explored in the literature: the stressful nature of the job (eg: Gronn and Lacey 2005a; Lacey 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2004; National Association of Elementary School Principals 1998a, 1999b; Wallace Foundation 2003), the impact on personal and family life (eg: Carlin, d'Arbon, Dorman, Duigan and Neidhart 2003; D'Arbon 2003; Dorman and d'Arbon 2003; Neidhart and Carlin 2003), a loss of close relationships with staff and students (eg: Dorman and d'Arbon 2003; Gronn and Lacey 2005a; Lacey 2001, 2003), level of salary compared to the responsibilities of the job (eg: Beaudin, Thompson and Jacobson 2002; Gronn and Lacey 2005a, 2005b; Lacey 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2004), and the impact of gender (eg: Brooking, Collins, Court and O'Neill 2003; Carlin, d'Arbon, Dorman, Duigan and Neidhart 2003; Pounder and Galvin 2003).

A significant deterrent for people considering applying for a principalship is the selection process. Concerns with this process include a lack of confidence in the merit principle (eg: Blackmore and Barty 2004; Brooking 2005; Green 2002; Hughes 2004; Lacey 2002a; Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Pritchard 2003), a perception that 'known' applicants are advantaged over 'unknown' ones (eg: Barty and Sachs 2004; Blackmore and Barty 2004; Hughes 2004; Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b, 2005c), the power of the superintendent in influencing the outcome of the selection process (eg: Barty, Thompson, Blackmore and Sachs 2005; Gronn and Lacey 2005a, 2005b; Hughes 2004), and the costly nature of the process (eg: Barty, Thompson, Blackmore and Sachs 2005; Gourley, Taylor and Doe 2001; Hughes 2004; Lacey 2002c, 2004; Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). With some limited exceptions (eg: the work of d'Arbon 2003; Gourley, Taylor and Doe 2001), there is little research into the situation that exists in Tasmania.

1.1 Formulation of the research focus

In choosing the research topic (perceptions of the selection process for principals in the state of Tasmania), the researcher was guided by Morse's statement that:

The key to selecting a qualitative research topic is identifying something that will hold one's interest over time. New investigators can best identify such a topic by reflecting on what is of real personal interest to them. (1994:220)

and that of Burns:

A researcher must first of all decide on the general subject of investigation. Such choices are necessarily very personal, but should lead to an area that holds deep interest ... otherwise the motivation to complete the research may be difficult to sustain. The researcher's own knowledge, experience, and circumstances usually determine their choices. (2000:26)

Bearing these injunctions in mind, the research topic was chosen because the researcher was a principal herself, and had personally engaged in a number of selection processes. Additionally, she had had numerous conversations (independent of, and prior to, this research) with colleagues who had also participated in selection processes, and had expressed strong reactions to these processes.

It was these experiences that guided the choice of topic. In order to establish that research into principal selection is a worthy undertaking, and to further refine the topic, a review of the literature around the issue of principalship selection was undertaken. From this literature review, the following areas were identified for investigation because of their links to the research topic: the importance of the role of the principal, both generally, in improving student learning, and in schools which are improving and high-performing; the growing concern over declining numbers of applicants for the principalship, both nationally and internationally; reasons why this decline is occurring,

including the impact of the position on personal and family life, demands of the position and associated stress, insufficient financial recompense for the demands of the job, loss of close relationships with students and staff, the perceived effect of gender on promotion, the reputation and/or size of the school where the vacancy exists, increased accountability and bureaucratisation of the role of the principal; satisfaction with current role, but dissatisfaction with principal selection processes; and personnel selection methodologies, their effectiveness and effects.

Much of the research detailed in the literature review (Chapter Two) pertained to international settings and to mainland Australia. A gap in the literature was established as being an in-depth interview approach to uncover the views of participants in the principal selection process in the Tasmanian context.

From this study of the literature, three broad research questions were established. These were:

- what are the views of participants in the principal selection process that exists in the Tasmania Department of Education?
- what effects does participation in the process have on participants themselves?
- What are the implications for the system (Department of Education)?

This research investigated the perceptions of the selection process for principals in Tasmanian government schools from a group of people involved in the process. A qualitative method of enquiry, based on an interpretative constructionist approach, which used semi-structured interviews as the data collection method, was chosen (Chapter Three).

1.2 Significance of the study

Despite the crucial role that principals play, numbers of applicants for principalship vacancies are said to be declining, and one of the reasons for this is the process used to select principals. There is a small, but increasing body of research into people's perceptions of principal selection processes,

but almost none in the Tasmanian context. The only specific Tasmanian research was conducted as a part of data gathering for the Principal Selection Project (Gourley, Taylor and Doe 2001) and did not explore the views of applicants on the process. Tasmanian information has formed part of other studies such as research by Carlin, d'Arbon, Dorman, Duigan and Neidhart (2003), whose findings indicated dissatisfaction with selection procedures as being a disincentive for women applying for principalship positions in Catholic schools.

This study aims to fill this void in the research, to delve into perceptions held by participants in the selection process for principals in Tasmania, in order to identify more fully which specific aspects of the process people find both satisfactory and unsatisfactory.

In its use of semi-structured interviews as the data-gathering instrument, this study will facilitate an in-depth exploration of the issue with participants. In doing so, it is anticipated that the study will add to the existing knowledge of peoples' perceptions of principalship selection, with its links to declining number of principalship applicants. This study goes further, in that it specifically investigates the Tasmanian context, adding to the very limited information that exists on the current situation. It provides data that could help to shape future principal selection processes, which in turn may address the issue of declining numbers of people applying for principalship positions. Finally, it offers information to guide further research into making the selection process more effective.

1.3 Limitations of the study

The number of participants in the study was twenty-one. While this number fitted in with the research design principles of voluntary participation and currency of knowledge, and met the theoretical construct of saturation point, it does raise questions of how possible it is to generalise the findings of the research. However, the research design used was based on qualitative interviews, and this provided more in-depth perceptions of people involved in

the selection process than had been possible through the use of questionnaires or surveys.

The results of this study are contextualised by the time at which the investigation was conducted. The principal selection process in Tasmania is an evolving one, and some of the issues raised by participants in the research, notably that of the imposition of word limits, are no longer part of the process. The findings would be strengthened if the research were to be replicated in the future, to determine if the findings hold true for another group of participants, and to determine the impact of the changes in the selection process.

The researcher was not strictly a participant observer. This is defined by Burns (2000) as being a researcher who:

... lives as much as possible with, and in the same manner as, the individuals being investigated. Researchers take part in the daily activities of people, reconstructing their interactions and activities in fieldnotes taken on the spot, or as soon as possible after their occurrence. (2000:405).

However, she did have personal experience with the selection process for principals in Tasmania, and thus had, as Burns suggests, taken part in the activities around which the research was focused. It was imperative therefore that the researcher guarded against any bias (see section 3.2).

1.4 Definition of terms

The term 'principal' refers to the position of school leader, and is the term used in the Tasmanian context. In other settings, the words 'head', 'headteacher' or 'headmaster' describe the same position.

The term 'superintendent' refers to the position of leader of a school district.

The term Essential Learnings (ELs) refers to the curriculum platform that is in place in Tasmanian Department of Education schools, and was also in place during the time of the conduct of this research.

The terms Human Resource (HR) and Human Resource Branch (HRB) refer to the section of the Department of Education which has the responsibility for personnel selection and promotion.

1.5 Organisation of the study

The next chapter reviews the literature on the issue of principalship selection and allied areas. Chapter Three details the study's methodology and procedures. Chapter Four describes the results of the study, and Chapter Five discusses the findings, conclusions, recommendations and implications drawn from the results of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of the literature on issues surrounding principalship selection in order to establish a context for the research study.

It begins with an overview of what the literature says about the role that the principal plays in a number of key areas related to student and school success. Having established that the role of the principal is an important one, it then examines a trend reported in the literature on the declining numbers of applicants for principalship positions, both internationally and nationally, and reasons why this is occurring, with a particular focus on applicant dissatisfaction with principal selection methods as one of those reasons. It builds on this literature on principalship selection method dissatisfaction with a discussion on principalship selection processes being used both nationally and internationally, and concludes with an overview of personnel selection methodologies, their effectiveness and effect on applicants, concentrating on those most commonly used in principalship selection.

2.1 The role of the principal

A focus of educational research has been the identification of those factors that contribute to school/student success. A number of factors have been identified, including class size (eg: Illig 1996; National Education Association 2006), learning styles (eg: Diaz and Carnal 1999; Gardner 1993), the role of the teacher (eg: Department of Education and Training ACT 2004; Hattie 2003), and the role of the principal. It is on this last factor that this section is focused.

In examining issues of principalship selection, it is important to establish why this is a worthy endeavour - why the role of principal is significant enough to ensure that the process used to select them is a good one. The role that the principal plays in schools has been the basis of considerable research over an

extensive period of time, and for a number of reasons, has been determined as being a key in why schools are successful. The following section provides a synopsis of the major thrusts of this research.

It firstly looks at the role generally, and then, whilst these delineations are closely related to each other, it examines what the literature is saying about that role in more specific areas, such as how that role impacts on the quality of teachers' work, on student learning, and on improving and high performing schools.

Principals are seen as being a determinant in the creation and sustenance of good schools (NCSL 2002; Teske and Schneider 1999), with researchers arguing that without strong leadership in schools, the core business of schools - improving student learning - will not occur. Reports such as one by Bottoms, O'Neill, Fry and Hill (2003), which has the self-explanatory title Good principals are the key to successful schools: Six strategies to prepare more good principals, exemplify this literature through statements such as:

If you want high-performing schools, hire principals who can lead them to success. It's a simple formula, and several decades of solid research have proved that it works ... high performing principals understand which school and classroom practices improve student achievement, know how to work with teachers to bring about positive change, support teachers in carrying out instructional practices that help all students succeed ... (2003:1)

The principal sets the tone or culture of the school (Dinham 2004; Heck and Marcoulides 1993; NCSL 2002; Stewart 2002; Stolp 1994) by establishing what is important through their words and actions, by the role they play in managing the school, in affecting the school climate and the instructional program that operates within it, as is opined by Dinham (2004) in his research which examined the impact that school leadership had in producing outstanding outcomes for students in junior secondary education in the United Kingdom:

... the degree of influence of the Principal was somewhat surprising while there is little doubt as to the importance of the individual teacher, based on these findings, principals can play key roles in providing the conditions and climate where teachers can operate effectively. (2004:28)

This is also opined in the findings of a report produced for the NCSL in the United States which examined the role that school leaders play in improving student outcomes in the United States:

Exemplary schools have an effective leader who sets the tone for the rest of the school and engages all stakeholders - teachers, students, parents and other staff - in schoolwide efforts to improve student learning. (2002:3)

The findings of the Leadership for Organisational Learning and Improved Student Outcomes project [LOLSO] (Mulford and Silins 2003) echo this. One focus of the research was to find reasons for the variations in organisational learning that exist between secondary schools in Tasmania and South Australia. Among the significant variations that accounted for this, were principals. The researchers determined that the principals of schools which made a difference to student learning were those who were skilled in transformational leadership, actively involved in the core work of the school, and focused on the development of a shared vision, a culture of trust and participative decision making, the provision of support, and an expectation of high performance.

High-quality, skilled, and sustainable educational leadership is essential to schools (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning [McREL] 2000) and without it, the transformation of public schools would not occur. In the context of schools with high levels of poverty, this is also true. Carter's (2000) research revealed that almost half of the traits identified as central to the success of high-performing schools in poor communities were directly related to the role played by principals.

Through the use of personal attributes such as analysis, reflection, action, integrity and enthusiasm, principals are, as Clement eloquently espouses: 'the orchestrators who blend the values [of the school community] together' (2003:116). Their words and actions have a significant impact on how the vision of the school is enacted in actuality.

This is also true in the Tasmanian context, where Mulford and Johns (2004), found that principals have an impact on student learning, indirectly, through their impact on the capacity or culture of the school. They found that successful school principals based their work on a personal, core set of beliefs, and that, because these beliefs impacted directly on the development of a shared vision and curriculum for the school, these in turn affected teaching and learning, student outcomes and community social capital.

The role that the principal plays in schools is seen as being at its most direct in the impact that it has on how teachers undertake their work with students. Through discussions with teachers about their work, principals have an impact on student outcomes:

Principals become servants to their vision of success for all students. They convey this vision to teachers, students, and parents through their actions. Because the interactions between teachers and students are critical, how principals influence this aspect of the educational process is important. Principals participate in the instructional process through their discussions with teachers about instructional issues, their observations of

classroom instruction, and their interactions
with teachers when examining student data.
(Southwest Educational Development
Laboratory [SEDL] 1991:4)

Sebring and Bryk's findings (2000) confirm this. In reporting on the situation in Chicago, they contend that a critical factor in determining whether or not a school is able to improve learning opportunities for students is the quality of the principal's leadership. Bell, Bolam and Cubillo's research (2003), being a systematic review of the impact of school headteachers and principals on student outcomes, supports this with their findings that effective leadership is an important factor in a school's success indirectly, through key intermediate factors, such as the work of teachers, on student outcomes. Mulford (2005) concurs with this, reporting that leadership in schools (of which leadership by the principal is one type) is a contributor to school-wide collective efficacy, or in Mulford's terms, organisational learning. He found that organisational learning is 'the important intervening variable between leadership and teacher work, and then student outcomes' (2005:44).

Waters, Marzano and McNulty's research (2003) reviewed thirty years of research into the impact of school leadership on student outcomes. They propose a more direct relationship between the principal and student outcomes, identifying both positive and negative impacts. They found a statistically positive relationship between school leadership and student achievement, and a converse relationship, in that school leaders who concentrate on 'wrong' school or classroom practices or who miscalculate the magnitude of changes they are attempting to implement, can have a negative impact on student achievement. This view of the importance of the role of the principal in affecting student outcomes is mirrored by the research results of Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004), who found that the role of school leadership related directly to improving student learning, and that this was second only to teaching among the school-related factors that impact on student learning.

The principal also affects teacher work through the facilitation of effective professional learning for staff (Girvan 2005) so that their work with students is of the highest quality.

Gamage's 2005 research sought the views of principals about their work. It revealed that the work the principal does is viewed by them as being more influential in how effective school reform efforts will be, than written policies on what should happen.

2.1.1 Overview of literature related to the impact of aspects of the role of the principal

The importance of the role of the principal can be viewed in numerous ways. In this study, the general impact of the role, as well as characteristics of its impact on student learning and the creation and sustenance of high performing schools was chosen. Table 1 overviews some of the main points of this research.

Table 1: Literature related to the impact of aspects of the role of the principal

The role of the principal generally	The role of the principal in improving student learning	The role of the principal in high performing schools
<p>'Defines the culture of schools' (Teske and Schneider 1999)</p> <p>'If you want high-performing schools, hire principals who can lead them to success' (Bottoms, O'Neill, Fry and Hill 2003)</p> <p>'Act as a filter and conduit for establishing the "core" values that the school will honour' (Stewart 2002)</p> <p>'Real school reform efforts are determined and guided by the principals' beliefs, perspectives and visions, rather than by the high-sounding rhetoric of policy-makers and published research literature' (Gamage 2005)</p>	<p>Principals participate in the instructional process in a range of ways. (SEDL 1991)</p> <p>Role of the principal had a significant impact on student academic achievement (Heck and Marcoulides 1993)</p> <p>'Engages all stakeholders ... in schoolwide efforts to improve student learning' (NCSL 2002)</p> <p>Effective leadership had an indirect effect on student outcomes (Bell, Bolam and Cubillo 2003)</p> <p>Beliefs impacted on shared vision for the school ... affected teaching and learning and student outcomes (Mulford and Johns 2004)</p> <p>'Effects of leadership on student learning are small, but educationally significant' (Leithwood and Riehl 2004)</p> <p>'Second only to teaching among the school-related Factors that impact on student learning' (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson and Wahlstrom 2004)</p> <p>Facilitate effective professional learning for staff (Girvan 2005)</p> <p>Statistically positive relationship between school leadership and student achievement (Waters, Marzano and McNulty 2003)</p> <p>Principals have an impact on organization learning, which in turn affects teachers' work, which affects student outcomes (Mulford 2005)</p>	<p>'Sets the tone for the rest of the school' (NCSL 2002)</p> <p>'Providing the conditions and climate where teachers can operate effectively' (Dinham 2004)</p> <p>Facilitate the development of a shared vision, a culture of trust and participative decision making, the provision of support, and an expectation of high performance (Mulford and Silins 2003)</p> <p>'Leadership of the principal is a central factor for effective schools' (Teske and Schneider 1999)</p> <p>'Principals enable their schools to become positive and productive environments' (Clement 2003)</p> <p>High-quality, skilled, and sustainable educational leadership is essential for transformation of schools (McREL 2000)</p> <p>Almost half of the traits identified as central to the success of high-performing schools in poor communities were directly related to principals (Carter 2000)</p> <p>A critical factor in determining whether or not a school is able to improve learning opportunities for students is the quality of the principal's leadership (Sebring and Bryk 2000)</p> <p>Principals have an impact on organisational learning (Mulford and Silins 2003)</p>

In summary, the research into the impact of aspects of the role of the principal highlights its importance, both generally and as a factor in a number of key

areas: student learning and the creation and sustenance of high performing schools, as exemplified by the findings of Leithwood and Riehl:

... large scale quantitative studies of schooling conclude that the effects of leadership on student learning are small, but educationally significant ... [comprising] nearly one-quarter of the total effect of all school factors" (Leithwood and Riehl 2004:5).

2.2 Concern over the declining numbers of applicants for principalship vacancies

Having established that the role of the principal is an important one, it follows then that it is beneficial to have satisfactory numbers of quality applicants vying for positions as they become vacant, so that the person chosen for the job has high quality skills and attributes. For some time, it has been argued that this has not been the case, and there has been a growing body of literature both at the international and national levels devoted to the issue of shrinking fields of principalship applicants. Within this literature, there is some disagreement over whether or not this decline is a general issue, or one that is apparent only in differing contexts. Both of these views are covered in the following section.

2.2.1 International views on numbers of principalship applicants

2.2.1.1 Canada

Echols and Grimmett (2000) reported that the numbers of applications for administrative positions had declined over the two or three years prior to their report, but that this was more problematic in urban and rural districts than in metropolitan ones. An article by Williams (2003) reported a more generalised concern over the situation in Ontario, stating that there was growing evidence that fewer people were applying for advertised principal vacancies, and that superintendents had reported fewer numbers of applicants for vacancies at

both the principal and vice-principal levels than had been experienced in previous years.

2.2.1.2 New Zealand

A 2003 article about the situation in New Zealand is entitled, 'Getting below the surface of the principal recruitment "crisis" in New Zealand'. It examined reasons for the situation, noting: 'consistently since 1989, surveys of primary school principals document a growing crisis of recruitment and retention'. (Brooking, Collins, Court and O'Neill 2003:156).

2.2.1.3 The United Kingdom

Apprehension over declining numbers of applicants for principal vacancies are also noted in the United Kingdom. Draper and McMichael (1998) cited the Headteachers Association of Scotland as being concerned that the low numbers of people seeking to go into headships in either primary or secondary schools in that country was an issue, at a time when the role of the head (principal) was being acknowledged as important in raising educational standards. The article also noted concerns in England over an approaching crisis in the recruitment of headteachers.

Again in 1998, a report entitled, 'Headship? No thanks! A study of factors influencing career progression to headship' (James and Whiting 1998), sought to identify those aspects of the role of headteacher (principal) that were dissuading people from applying for these positions. It identified the situation in that country as characterised by 'buoyant' numbers of applicants for the pre-requisite qualification for the principalship, the National Professional Qualification for Headship, but this not being matched by an equally high number of applicants for Headship.

2.2.1.4 The United States

Two reports were published in 1998 by one of the peak principal organisations in the United States, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). The first (NAESP 1998a) noted that there was a shortage of qualified candidates for principal vacancies in the United States, and that this shortage had occurred among all types of schools (rural, urban, suburban) and among all levels of vacancies (elementary, junior high/middle, and high school). The second (NAESP 1998b) stated that shortages of well-qualified candidates for principalship positions were reported among 52% of rural, 45% of suburban and 47% of urban schools in the country.

Two articles, which appeared in the media in 2001, showed that the issue of the decreasing number of principalship candidates had attracted attention outside of education circles. The first, an article in Time magazine entitled, 'How to fix the coming principal shortage' noted that:

Within the next five years more than 40% of the nation's 93,000 principals are expected to retire. Districts across the country are already feeling the crunch: a San Jose superintendent had to take 33 trips across the country last year to find four principals he was satisfied with; New York City's schools began last year with 163 temporary principals; 39% of Chicago's principals are already eligible for retirement. (Goldstein, 2001)

The second, a news broadcast, echoed these concerns:

... there are fewer people interested in becoming a principal than ever before ... in Baltimore, 34 of its 180 principals have left in the past two years. That has left the city scrambling for qualified replacements. New York City faced a similar shortage this past fall when it opened schools with 165 principals of 1000 not certified. The shortage has hit big urban schools the hardest, but it's a problem nationwide, happening in suburban and rural schools, elementary and middle schools, as well as high schools. (Broward, 2001)

Two reports in 2002 were also focused on the issue. Beaudin, Thompson and Jacobson indicated that, across the nation, school districts reported a decrease in the pool of qualified candidates who apply for school principal positions, and that the problem was expected to continue. A survey of superintendents found that the degree of perceived shortages varied by type of community and school level. A report by the NCSL (2002) confirmed the importance of the role of the principal in school reform, and expressed concern over the projected difficulty in filling principalship positions:

... by 2008, the number of principals needed to fill new positions created by growth is expected to increase by ten to twenty percent. Forty percent of current school administrators are expected to retire in the next six years. Location and size of the district does not seem to be a factor; urban, suburban and rural district all face shortages, although urban districts are facing more immediate shortages. (2002:3)

Three reports in 2003 (Wallace Foundation; Rayfield and Diamantes; Roza) reported varied perceptions of a principal shortage. The Wallace Foundation noted a localised rather than a generalised shortage, with some individual schools, in high-growth regions, or within large, problem-plagued districts having problems attracting enough qualified job seekers. Rayfield and Diamantes' findings asserted that the complex and time-consuming work of the secondary principal may explain applicant reluctance toward the job. A report by Roza for the Centre on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) at the University of Washington reported similar findings when it indicated that there was no generalised shortage in the number of applications received for principalship positions, stating that there had been only a modest decline of around two applicants per position over seven years. The report went on to assert that the situation was more a case of different situations occurring in different districts. The results of this research indicated that some districts (and schools within districts) were avoided by prospective principals, and that overall, increased numbers of applicants in some districts were offset by

decreases, or no change, in others. The report characterised the problem as being one of distribution, rather than inadequate supply.

2.2.2 National views on numbers of principalship applicants

A 2002 report in the Age newspaper was entitled 'Why top job gets low marks', and sought to explore why the numbers of people applying for principalships in Victoria was declining. As discussed above in relation to the United States, this indicated that an education issue had been taken into a broader context. It was predicated on the assumption that there were fewer applicants for principalship positions, and stated that:

... while precise figures on the number of applicants for principal vacancies during the last 10 years are not available, there is strong anecdotal evidence that in government and non-government primary and secondary schools fewer teachers - especially women - are applying for the top job. (Dunn 2002)

It went on to note concerns expressed by the President of the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Ted Brierley: 'vacancies in schools that would have attracted 20 to 30 applicants a decade ago are now getting about five, and more vacancies are going unfilled'. In 2003, another newspaper article in the Age entitled 'Shortage of school principals looming' (Cervini 2003), highlighted concerns over the numbers of applicants for principalship positions.

A number of reports were published in 2003. d'Arbon researched the situation of numbers of applicants for principalship positions in Catholic schools in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. The report noted that the growing shortage of applicants for principal positions in these contexts was worsening, and advised that 'these results point to the need that, unless steps are taken to address the situation, the looming crisis in the provision of principals for Catholic schools, would worsen' (2003:7). As part of their report entitled 'Principal recruitment in a climate of leadership

disengagement', Gronn and Rawlings-Saenei examined a range of sources on the issue of principalship shortage. They concluded, among other findings, that there was evidence of reduced numbers of applicants for principalship vacancies in a growing percentage of schools, and that an increasing percentage of schools were not able to make an appointment following an advertisement of vacancy. Research by Thompson, Blackmore, Sachs and Tregenza contended that the portrayal of the principalship as a largely unappealing job was contributing to lower numbers of applicants for principalship positions, while Mulford queried: 'Is there a shortage? A number of recent publications from different countries say that the answer is a clear yes'. (2003a:30)

Two years later, a study done by Gronn and Lacey (2005b), noted that limited data existed on numbers of applicants for principalship vacancies nationally. In quoting the seemingly low numbers of applicants for principalship vacancies in Victoria for the three years of 1999, 2000 and 2001 (an average of 7.3, 6.7 and 7.4 applications in each year respectively), the researchers advise that some degree of caution is needed when looking at these figures, contending that the situation may be more alarming than the figures suggest:

The smallness of this figure in absolute terms probably means that some schools selected candidates from very restricted interview shortlists, or may even have had no applicants. Moreover, given that candidates often submit applications for multiple vacancies and may be preferred by a number of schools, in some cases, schools may have had a very limited opportunity to secure their first preferences or may not have had an acceptable candidate. (2005b:4)

A 2005 report by Barty, Thompson, Blackmore and Sachs examined data on numbers of applicants for principalship positions. It confirmed that a problem does exist with declining numbers of applicants for principalships, but that this was a problem for schools in the government sector, rather than in the Catholic or independent school sector.

Little specific data are available on numbers of applicants for principalship positions in Tasmania. However, as part of the research into principal selection at that time (Gourley, Taylor and Doe 2001), it was ascertained that the average number of applicants for principalship positions in 1894 was twelve; in 1999, this had dropped to eight.

2.2.3 Overview of literature related to declining numbers of principalship applicants

Concern has been expressed in research literature as well as in popular media over declining numbers of applicants for principalship vacancies. Table 2 overviews the literature related to this situation.

Table 2: Literature related to decline in numbers of principalship applicants

	Generalised decline in applicants for principalship	Specific issues related to decline in applicants for principalship
International	NAESP 1998a, 1998b James and Whiting 1998 Goldstein 2001 Broward 2001 Beaudin, Thompson and Jacobson 2002 NCSL 2002 Draper and McMichael 1998 Williams 2003 Rayfield and Diamantes 2003 Brooking, Collins, Court and O'Neill 2003	Echols and Grimmert 2000 Roza 2003 Wallace Foundation 2003
National	Gourley, Taylor and Doe 2001 Dunn 2002 d'Arbon 2003 Gronn and Rawlings-Saenei 2003 Mulford 2003a Gronn and Lacey 2005b	Thompson, Blackmore, Sachs and Tregenza 2003 Barty, Thompson, Blackmore and Sachs 2005

In summary, the literature on the nature of the situation around numbers of applicants for principalship positions is not consistent in a view of the extent of the issue. On the one hand, there is a body of literature indicating a generalised trend of fewer people applying for principalship vacancies at both international and national level; on the other, some researchers, while acknowledging that a shortage does exist, contend that the situation is not straightforward. They consider the situation to be contextual, with some sectors (notably government, rather than Catholic or independent) and some schools (notably 'difficult', too large, too small, or with a poor reputation) feeling a cause for alarm.

Despite some disagreement over the extent of a principalship shortage (whether it is generalised or more specific in nature), the literature does

highlight that a shortage does exist, and predicts that it will do so into the future. Given what is known and accepted about the important role that principals play in schools, this is a concern for education authorities.

2.3 Reasons for declining numbers

Alongside the literature on 'the principalship shortage' (whether this be generalised or more focused), there is a body of research on why this is occurring. The term 'leadership disengagement' has been used by a number of researchers (Draper and McMichael 1998; Educational Research Service (ERS) 1998; Gronn and Rawlings-Saenei 2003) to describe the situation. A number of reports have been published which examine - either as their entire focus, or as a part of a larger picture - the reasons identified by potential applicants for not applying for principalship positions. This research is presented thematically in the section below.

2.3.1 The stressful nature of the job

The role of the principal is an intense one, and one that deters people from applying for it. Cooley and Shen exemplify research into this issue when they contend that 'the complexities of society in conjunction with demands of the school workplace continue to diminish the pool of qualified principals' (2000:446). Brooking et al's New Zealand research findings (2003) - that the increase in principal workload and the increasing emphasis on management and administration to the detriment of curriculum leadership both act as disincentives for potential principalship applicants - concur with this. Gronn and Rawlings-Saenei (2003) refer to the expansion and intensification of the role. This occurs as increasingly more responsibilities are devolved to the school, and with the increasing emphasis on outcomes-based education. This growth in the scope of the role has caused it to become increasingly stressful, and as a result, less appealing for people to apply for. This is true both internationally, with research in the United Kingdom (Draper and McMichael 1998) and in the United States (NAESP 1998a, 1998b; Wallace Foundation 2003), as well as in this country (Dorman and d'Arbon 2003; Gronn and Lacey

2005a; Gronn and Rawlings-Saenei 2003; Lacey 2001, 2002c, 2004; Milbourne 2000; Mulford 2003b, 2005) finding that the stressful nature of the jobs deters potential applicants from applying. Lacey's work (2002c) indicates that this is particularly true for non-principals considering whether or not to apply.

2.3.2 The impact on personal and family life

Closely allied to the stress associated with the principalship is how this impacts on personal and family life. The long hours spent undertaking the various demands of the job, as well as its stressful nature, has an effect on the quality and quantity of personal/family time. Draper and McMichael (1998) found that quality of life issues were an important disincentive for people considering applying for headship positions in the United Kingdom, while Cooley and Shen's (2000) survey of almost 900 people in teaching, principal or superintendent positions in the United States found that the impact of the principalship on personal life was the tenth strongest disincentive (out of thirty) for people not applying for principalship positions. In this country, research by Gronn and Lacey (2005), Gronn and Rawlings-Saenei (2003) and Lacey (2001, 2002c, 2004) has focused on the area of declining numbers of applicants for the principalship. Consistently, the negative effect that the role has on personal and family life is shown to be one of the top reasons that people do not apply for a principalship. This research is endorsed by other Australian researchers. A number of studies have been conducted into the situation in Catholic schools (Carlin et al. 2003; d'Arbon 2003; Dorman and d'Arbon 2003; Neidhart and Carlin 2003), while Mulford's work (2005) looks at the principalship in schools more generally. Their results also indicate that the impact that the principalship has on personal and family life acts as a strong deterrent for people considering applying for principalship positions.

2.3.3 The loss of close relationships with staff and students

A particular aspect of the nature of the principal's job - a loss of close relationships with staff and students - has also been shown to be a disincentive for potential applicants (Dorman and d'Arbon 2003; Draper and McMichael 1998; Gronn and Lacey 2005a; Lacey 2002c). This research has found that teachers enjoy the nature of their work with students and the relationships they have with colleagues, and consider that the role of principal would mean a diminishing of these work satisfiers.

2.3.4 Salary concerns

Given the increasingly stressful nature of the job, and the effect that this has on principals personally, the level of financial recompense received for the work has become an issue. As Beaudin et al. (2002) in the United States found, considerations about salary and benefits were a significant issue for people:

Sixty-nine percent of the current administrator and 61.6 percent of the teacher respondents indicated that a salary and benefits commensurate with the amount of time, both length of workday and length of school year, and level of responsibilities were critical factors in their decision to pursue new positions. Inadequate compensation and benefits were factors that 44.2 percent of the current administrators and 45.4 percent of the teachers cited as reasons for not considering new administrator positions. (2002:24)

In this country, a number of reports by Gronn and Lacey (2005a, 2005b), Lacey (2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2004), and Mulford (2005) have found also that one of the major disincentives to applying for the principalship to be inadequate salary for the level of responsibility:

... the level of remuneration [for principals] ranked as only a moderate incentive to promotion by all groups ... while teachers

see their current salary level as a source of dissatisfaction, the economic impact of the increase in salary of a principal was not seen a strong incentive to promote. (Lacey 2002c:27)

2.3.5 Gender issues

The issue of the impact of gender and the principalship is one that has emerged as being of concern in the literature. One aspect of the gender issue is the lower number of women applying for or expressing an interest in applying for principalship positions (Carlin et al. 2003). Another dimension to this issue is the lower representation of women in principalship positions (eg: Brooking et al. 2003; Milbourne 2000; Pounder and Galvin 2003), itself a disincentive to other women who may be considering applying for the principalship.

2.3.6 The impact of contextual issues

The issue of declining numbers of applicants for the principalship may be one of specificity than generalisability in the view of some researchers. A report by the Wallace Foundation (2003) in the United States revealed that schools in difficult areas were likely to attract small fields of applicants. Barty and Sachs (2004) and Barty et al. (2005) assert that it is contextual issues about schools that influence decision-making of potential applicants. Significant issues include the size and reputation of the school, whether or not there was an incumbent already in the role and whether or not friends were thought to be applying.

A common thread throughout much of the literature on decreasing numbers of applicants is dissatisfaction with the process used to select principals. This will be explored in greater depth in the following section.

2.3.7 Overview of literature related to reasons for declining number of applicants

Table 3 overviews the issues identified in the research, as being significant contributors to the shrinking fields for principalship vacancies.

This overview indicates that the major disincentives for potential applicants to the principalship are the selection process; the impact of the position on personal and family life; the demands of the position, and associated stress; insufficient financial recompense for the demands of the job; loss of close relationships with students and staff; gender issues; and contextual issues related to vacant positions.

Table 3: Literature related to reasons for decline in numbers of principalship applicants

Issue	Literature
Dissatisfaction with the selection process	Neidhart and Carlin 2003 Lacey, 2002a, 2002b, 2003 Pritchard 2003 Wallace Foundation 2003 Mulford 2003a, 2003b Lacey 2000a, 2002b, 200c, 2001, 2004 Gronn and Lacey 2005a, 2005b Blackmore and Barty 2004 Carlin et al. 2003 Dorman and d'Arbon 2003 Gronn and Rawlings-Saenei 2003 Blackmore and Barty 2004 Barty and Sachs 2004
Demands of the position and associated stress	Draper and McMichael 1998 Milbourne 2000 NAESP 1998a, 1998b Cooley and Shen 2000 Lacey 2001, 2000a, 2002b, 200c, 2004 Gronn and Rawlings-Saenei 2003 Dorman and d'Arbon 2003 Brooking et al. 2003 Mulford 2003a, 2003b 2005 Gronn and Lacey 2005a, 2005b
Impact of the position on personal life	Draper and McMichael 1998 Cooley and Shen 2000 Lacey 2000a, 2002b, 2000c, 2001, 2004 Gronn and Lacey 2005a, 2005b Neidhart and Carlin 2003 Carlin et al. 2003 Gronn and Rawlings-Saenei 2003 Dorman and d'Arbon 2003 Mulford 2003a, 2003b Barty and Sachs 2004 Barty, Thompson, Blackmore and Sachs 2005
Loss of close relationships with students and staff	Draper and McMichael 1998 Dorman and d'Arbon 2003 Lacey 2001, 2000a, 2002b, 200c, 2004 Gronn and Lacey 2005a, 2005b
Insufficient financial recompense for the demanding nature of the job	Lacey 2000a, 2002b, 2000c, 2001, 2004 Beaudin, Thompson, and Jacobson 2002 Gronn and Rawlings-Saenei 2003 Mulford 2003a, 2003b Gronn and Lacey 2005a, 2005b
The perceived effect of gender on promotion to the principalship	Milbourne 2000 Brooking et al. 2003 Pounder and Galvin 2003 Dorman and d'Arbon 2003 Carlin, d'Arbon, Dorman, Duigan, and Neidhart, 2003
Contextual issues about the school in which the vacancy has occurred	Wallace Foundation 2003 Cooley and Shen 2000 Barty and Sachs 2004

2.4 Dissatisfaction with principalship selection processes

Contained within the literature about decreasing number of applicants for the principalship is the view that one of the major reasons for this leadership disengagement is potential applicants' dissatisfaction with the principalship selection process. This aspect of leadership disengagement has been the focus of various studies, as researchers have sought to tease out the elements of the process that people find unsatisfactory. The reasons for dissatisfaction, as discussed in the literature, are described below.

2.4.1 Loss of confidence in the merit principle

The merit principle guides selection processes, ensuring that, as is stated by the Tasmanian Department of Education 'any appointment to, or promotion within the State Service is made on the basis of the capacity of the person to do the job' (Department of Education, Tasmania 2004). The Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria 2006, states:

Promotion and advancement within the Department of Education, Employment and Training shall be determined solely on the basis of merit assessed in relation to the position involved. Thus, in filling a promotion vacancy, the selection panel must consider which candidate can demonstrate superior efficiency to all other candidates.

Studies of views of the selection process for principals have found a degree of cynicism over the use of the merit principle as part of the process (eg: Blackmore and Barty 2004; Brooking 2005; Green 2002; Hughes 2004; Lacey 2002a, 2002b; Lacey and Gronn 2005b; Pritchard 2003). Applicants for principalship positions have an expectation that the merit principle is adhered to in the conduct of the selection process, so as Barty and Sachs opine:

Failure of the merit selection process from working as it was intended, for the best applicant to be selected, has caused some people to refrain from applying for positions which did, in fact, interest them... Not

everyone has confidence in the merit selection process. (2004:3)

2.4.2 'Known' applicants are advantaged

Research reveals a perception that applicants who are known or internal (i.e. already in the school) are advantaged in the process, and more likely to be the successful candidate than those who are not (eg: Barty et al. 2005; Hughes 2004; Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b) with Hughes' research finding frequent criticism levelled at the principalship selection process because of preference being given to applicants from within the district. Gronn and Lacey (2005b) note a tendency for selection panels to 'clone their own':

... the increased predilection of government primary and secondary schools in some Australian states in the making of appointments to advertised principal class vacancies to nominate internal applicants (or candidates from within the school) in preference to external applicants. We characterise this trend as a form of role cloning; hence the notion of 'cloning their own' ... the selection panels which act on behalf of schools and their communities are seeking to ensure that the persons to whom they accord senior level responsibilities are 'known', as distinct from 'unknown', quantities. (2005b:2)

2.4.3 The influence of the superintendent

The power of the superintendent in influencing the outcome of the selection process has been identified as an area of concern (eg: Barty and Sachs 2004; Gronn and Lacey 2005a; Hughes 2004). It is often the superintendent who oversees principalship selection panels, frequently taking on the role of Panel Chair. Research indicates a concern that: 'Superintendents, key players on interview panels, for example, clearly act as gate-keepers to keep some people out and champions to support others' (Barty and Sachs 2004:3).

2.4.4 The cost of the process

Another concern often raised about the selection process is its costly nature (eg: Barty and Sachs 2004; Gourley, Taylor and Doe 2001; Hughes 2004; Lacey 2002a, 2002b, 2004; Lacey and Gronn 2005a). One element of this is the time -costs involved. For applicants, this constitutes time for writing applications, preparing for and participating in interviews; for panel members, this involves the time involved in reading applications, short-listing, conducting interviews, obtaining and considering referee reports, report-writing and counselling unsuccessful applicants. Another aspect of the costliness of the process is '... the personal and physical toll exacted on [applicants] when they end up applying for tens of positions to try to obtain a promotion' (Hughes 2004:36), and, as Lacey's research reveals:

... [the process] was seen as traumatic because of a fear of rejection, a fear of the unknown and a lack of confidence ... to some women, the process was seen as an acceptance or rejection of them personally, rather than a selection of the most appropriate applicant in the eyes of that particular selection panel. (2004:31)

2.4.5 The ineffectiveness of the process

There are numerous methodologies that can be employed in personnel selection (an overview of some are covered later in this chapter). In Tasmania, the principalship selection process comprises a written application, interview and referee reports. Concerns have been expressed about interviews and applications as selection methodologies (eg: Blackmore and Barty 2004; Gronn and Lacey 2005a; Hughes 2004). The main issues identified are the lowered level of performance at interview due to stress (particularly highlighted in Gronn and Lacey's 2005 research), and reliance on the interview and application component aspects of the selection process:

... sixty-two percent of respondents were critical of the emphasis placed on the formulation, content and presentation of applications and performance at the

interview as key determinants of applicants' success or failure in gaining promotion. (Hughes 2004:38)

2.4.6 Ineffective feedback

The lack of constructive feedback (termed 'post-selection counselling' in the Tasmanian context) has also been identified as an issue (Carlin et al. 2003; Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, ACT 2003; Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b; Neidhart and Carlin 2003).

One of the two recommendations of the San Diego City Schools Commission Report on the review and revision of the eligibility and selection process for principals, vice principals and central office instructional administrators was that the process should be designed in such a way that it built internal capacity by, among strategies, providing a vehicle for career counselling and performance feedback.

Unsuccessful applicants are hopeful that the feedback provided to them at the conclusion of a selection process will assist them to improve their performance next time, but rarely find that this is the case; rather that what is provided is unhelpful, or not consistent:

Other complaints include the frustration of obtaining conflicting advice about how to improve, first, from different panel members (A#28) and second, as a result of changing their applications to take account of feedback, only to discover that 'that is not what the next panel wants or what somebody else thinks you should be doing'. (Gronn and Lacey 2005b:17)

2.4.7 Inconsistency of the process

As well as lack of consistency in the provision of post-selection counselling, a broader lack of consistency is also an issue (Blackmore and Barty 2004;

Hawkins 1991; Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b; Wendel and Breed 1988). One type of inconsistency is in the application of the selection process. Wendel and Breed's 1988 research in the United States found that the selection processes used by many school districts were often loosely organised, intuitive and based more on the selection panels' perceptions of administrator image (how applicants looked and spoke) rather than administrator skills. Another type of inconsistency is in the way in which the interview process is undertaken, as evidenced in White and White's research (1998), also conducted in the United States. They found that, while selection panel composition was similar across the country (being comprised of educators and community members), the actual interview process differed greatly from school to school, ranging from highly prepared panels, who asked the candidates to critique the committee in writing at the conclusion of the process, to others who were so ill-prepared that they sought advice from candidates during the interview on how to run the session. Yet another type of inconsistency is in the variation in selection decisions:

... the aspirants cite a series of vagaries which make for a hit or miss evaluative process. A good example is when the criteria for vacancies in schools in two different locations are worded almost exactly the same. In one case, an aspirant may get as close as being one of the last two applicants, yet in the other situation may not even be shortlisted. (Gronn and Lacey 2005b:14)

2.4.8 Panel competency concerns

Concerns have also been noted about panel competency (Blackmore and Barty 2004; Carlin et al. 2003; Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b; Neidhart and Carlin 2003), with, for example, Neidhart and Carlin's 2003 research revealing that this was one of four major disincentives for women aspiring to the principalship in Australian Catholic schools.

2.4.9 Overview of literature related to dissatisfaction with principalship selection processes

Table 4 overviews the major themes identified in the literature on the issue of dissatisfactions with the principal selection process.

Table 4: Literature related to specific concerns regarding the principal selection process

Issue	Literature
A loss of confidence in merit selection	Lacey 2002a, 2002b Green 2002 Pritchard 2003 Blackmore and Barty 2004 Hughes 2004 Barty and Sachs 2004 Lacey and Gronn 2005b Brooking 2005
Concerns about panel competency	Hawkins 1991 Neidhart and Carlin 2003 Carlin et al. 2003 Blackmore and Barty 2004 Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b Brooking 2005
Concerns about the transparency and fairness of the selection process	Hawkins 1991 Neidhart and Carlin 2003 Carlin et al. 2003 Gronn and Rawlings-Saenei 2003 Blackmore and Barty 2004 San Diego Schools 2005
The lack of constructive feedback provided to applicants at the conclusion of the process to help them to be more competitive next time	Carlin et al 2003 Neidhart and Carlin 2003 Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, ACT 2003 San Diego Schools 2005 Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b
The time-consuming nature of the process	Gourley, Taylor and Doe 2001 Lacey 2002a, 2000b, 2000c, 2004 Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, ACT 2003 Hughes 2004 Barty and Sachs 2004
The power of the superintendent in influencing the outcome of the selection process	Blackmore and Barty 2004 Hughes 2004 Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b Barty and Sachs 2004
Concern over validity of the process	Gourley, Taylor and Doe 2001 Green 2002 Blackmore and Barty 2004 San Diego Schools 2005

Table 4: Continued....

Issue	Literature
The complexity of the process	Neidhart and Carlin 2003 Carlin et al. 2003 Lacey, 2002a, 2002b, 2004 Barty and Sachs 2004
Lack of consistency – decisions, process	Wendel and Breed 1988 White and White 1998 Hawkins 1991 Blackmore and Barty 2004 Lacey and Gronn 2005b
The trauma caused by the selection process	Lacey 2002a, 2000b, 2000c, 2004 Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b Hughes 2004
The rigidity of the process	Gourley, Taylor and Doe 2000 Green 2002
Gender issues	Neidhart and Carlin 2003 Carlin et al. 2003
A perception that 'known' applicants are chosen over 'unknown' ones, or ones who may not fit a pre-determined mould	Blackmore and Barty 2004 Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b
Emphasis on pre-established criteria	Gourley, Taylor and Doe 2001 Green 2002
Unwritten codes of not applying for a position if there is already someone acting in it	Barty and Sachs 2004 d'Arbon 2003
Lack of valid bases for selection decisions	Wendel and Breed 1988 Brooking 2005
Reliance on interview/application	Hughes 2004; Blackmore and Barty 2004
The perception that the outcome of a principalship vacancy is pre-determined	Lacey and Gronn 2005b
Unwritten codes of not applying for a job if a friend is going to	Barty and Sachs 2004
The costs of the process	Hughes 2004

2.5 Personnel selection techniques - effectiveness

This section broadens the focus from principalship selection specifically into personnel selection generally, in order to enhance understanding about the effectiveness and the effect of selection techniques.

Selection processes are many and varied, and are chosen for use in specific situations depending on the nature of the position being filled. In general, in the Australian context, the processes used for principalship selection are a

combination of written application, interview and referee reports. These techniques are included in this section. Assessment centres are also included, because, while they do not feature highly in the Australian context, they are popular in other arenas, notably the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

2.5.1 Assessment centres

Assessment centres are essentially a combination of several other selection methods, in which applicants participate over the period of a day or more. In assessment centres applicants are evaluated on how well they are likely to perform in targeted jobs. Participation in an assessment centre involves the performance of a series of tasks related to the job in question. In the case of principalship selection these might include: a written task, an interview, and a job-specific task such as an in-tray prioritisation. People trained in assessment evaluate this performance.

Assessment centres are seen as an effective selection tool in the literature for a number of reasons: they reflect actual work environments and measure performance on multiple job dimensions (Kramer, McGraw and Schuler 1997; Wendel and Breed 1998); more than one trained rater with a common frame of reference evaluates each participant's behaviour (Kramer, McGraw and Schuler 1997); and they are seen as having high validity (Byham 2006; Hardy and Rowe 1999; Lievens and Thornton 2005).

On the negative side, the cost of using assessment centres may be a disincentive for their use (Anderson 1991; Makin and Robertson 1986), as may be the amount of time required for their administration (Hardy and Rowe 1999).

2.5.2 Applications

There is little in the research on applications as they are used in the Tasmanian context: a written overview of an applicant's beliefs and experiences against a set of selection criteria. The application used in Tasmania can sometimes invite applicants to submit a curriculum vitae providing more detailed information about experiences, qualifications and professional learning related to the principalship. In the literature, this most closely resembles a resumé. A cover sheet (see Appendix A) asks for limited biographical data.

Application forms are often the first line of selection. Their primary function is to make tentative inferences about an applicant's suitability for employment in the specific position for which s/he is being considered. In other words, they are used to provide biographical data about the candidate and, as such, are an effective means of quickly collecting verifiable, and therefore usually accurate, basic biographical and historical facts. A completed application form usually provides three types of information: substantive information such as qualifications, employment progress in the form of job history, and employment stability in the form of previous work record.

Views on the effectiveness of applications vary in the literature. On the positive side, application forms can be an efficient way to reduce large numbers of applicants (Hardy and Rowe 1999), the biographical data provided in application forms is easily verifiable (Clark 1989), and they are a way of judging how applicants express themselves and think (Anderson 1991).

On the negative side, seeking information about marital status, age and gender on an application form may be questionable in terms of Equal Employment Opportunity legislation (Watson 1994), and information provided can quickly lose its currency (Makin and Robertson 1986).

2.5.3 Interviews

Interviews are a well-established device used in the selection of people for almost all jobs. In fact, they remain one of the most important selection tools for securing information and impressions about applicants (Clark 1989).

The benefits of interviews as a selection methodology, as identified in the literature, are that their use can make comparison between candidates easier if the same questions are asked of each candidate (Hardy and Rowe 1999); and situational interviews (interviews using questions which are linked to situations that would arise in the job) have higher validity (Hardy and Rowe 1999; Makin and Robertson 1986).

On the negative side, ways in which interviewers make judgements vary considerably (Clark 1989; White and White 1998); they may not be effective because insufficient preparation has gone into them (Weiss 2000); the impact of factors such as appearance, voice and other personal traits on the outcome of the interview is significant (Clark 1989; Fletcher 1990; Newman, 1980; O'Neill 1978; Watson 1994); they can be highly subjective (Anderson 1988; Watson 1994); decisions are often made on impressions gained in the first few minutes of the interview (Jensen 1986); and the person most polished in the skills needed in an interview situation is often the one hired, even though he or she may not be the best candidate for the position (Guion and Gibson 1988).

Despite all of this, and the fact that interviews are the selection technique with the lowest validity (Baltzell and Dentler 1983; Makin and Robertson 1986), the interview is generally seen as being an important part of a selection process.

2.5.4 References

The use of references is very common in Australian selection (Clark 1989) and is viewed both positively and negatively in the literature.

On the plus side, their use is seen as effective because they are seen as a method of providing the employer/selector with the opportunity to clarify or confirm information provided by the candidate (Barada 1996; Dunn 1995; Hardy and Rowe 1999; Isaacs 1999); and past behaviour is a likely predictor of future behaviour, so a reference from a previous employee can give valuable insight into what a person has done before, and therefore what they are most likely to do in the future (Clark 1989; Hardy and Rowe 1999).

On the negative side, they have the disadvantage of needing to rely on the honesty and perceptions of the referee (Barada 1996; Castetter 1992; D'O'Brian 1993; Dunn 1995; Falcone 1992; Hardy and Rowe 1999; Isaacs 1999); and an applicant is likely to only ask people to be referees for them whom they believe will be favourable about their abilities (Clark 1989), thus bringing the validity of their views into question.

For these reasons, references are seen as being one of the least reliable selection methodologies (Harris, Toulson, and Livingstone 1996; Makin and Robertson 1986). Browning's (1968) research revealed a low correlation between references and subsequent performance evaluation of five hundred teachers.

2.5.5 A comparison of methods

By way of comparison of different selection methodologies, Harris, Toulson, and Livingstone (1996) undertook an extensive survey in New Zealand in 1996. The study determined both the perceived and reported validity of a number of selection techniques. The perceived validity of the three major components of the Tasmanian principal selection process (application,

interview and referee reports) was variable, with references and interviews being highly regarded, whilst interviews were not. The reported validity of references was low, whilst for targeted or situational interviews it was high. No data was given for applications.

2.5.6 Overview of literature related to effectiveness of selection techniques

Table 5 overviews of research into the positive and negative aspects of various selection methodologies.

Table 5: Overview of positives and negatives of various personnel selection methodologies

	Applications	Interviews	References
Positives	<p>Can reduce large numbers of applicants</p> <p>The biographical data is easily verifiable</p> <p>Are a way of judging how applicants express themselves and think</p>	<p>Can make comparison between candidates easier</p> <p>Situational interviews have higher validity</p>	<p>Allow clarification or confirmation of information provided by the candidate</p> <p>Can give valuable insight into what a person has done before, and therefore what they are most likely to do in the future</p>
Negatives	<p>May be questionable in terms of Equal Employment Opportunity legislation</p> <p>Information provided can quickly lose its currency</p>	<p>Ways in which interviewers make judgements vary considerably</p> <p>May be affected if insufficient preparation has gone into them</p> <p>Impact of non-content factors significant</p> <p>Can be highly subjective</p> <p>Potential effect of first impressions</p> <p>Potential effect of skill at interview</p>	<p>Rely on the honesty and perceptions of the referee</p> <p>Use of 'favourable' referees may effect validity</p>

2.6 Personnel selection techniques - effects

In addition to the research on selection techniques and their empirical effectiveness, in recent years, a new focus of research has emerged –

applicant reactions to the selection process. Though this relates to selection generally, rather than directly to principalship selection specifically, it is still pertinent to this research.

2.6.1 Elements of a process that impact positively on applicants

The methodologies used in personnel selection create a response in participants. The presence of elements such as the provision of relevant information about the job, the type of participation they were able to engage in during the selection procedure, the transparency of the procedure, and the feedback on their performance that they received in an honest, considerate and understandable manner have an impact on participants. The more these elements are evidenced, the better participants felt about the process they had engaged in (Schuler 1993).

2.6.2 Justice issues

Issues of distributive (the outcome of the selection process) and procedural (the way the process is conducted) justice have an effect on applicants' reactions to a selection system (Gilliland 1994). The expectations that applicants had of being hired have a significant effect on how they felt about the fairness of the decision. Having the selection process and decision explained effectively (known as post-selection counselling in the Tasmanian Department of Education context) appeased some of the negative reactions of rejected applicants. The selection being made on the basis of a highly job-related selection procedure had a mixed impact on the self-efficacy of participants - an adverse effect on those who were not successful, and a positive effect on those who were.

2.6.3 Impact of success versus non-success

Whether or not an applicant is successful affects how they feel about the process (Gilliland 1995), with successful applicants being most concerned

about consistency of treatment, while those who were not successful are more concerned about receiving timely feedback on their performance and what they perceived to be blatant bias on the part of the selectors.

2.6.4 How candidates feel they are treated

Interpersonal treatment is also an important factor in how people feel about selection procedures (Deros and De Witte 2001; Deros, Born and De Witte 2004; Gilliland 1995; Madigan and Macan 2005), with applicants preferring, as Deros, Born and De Witte term it, humane treatment during the process - being treated in a warm, respectful way with all information provided by them to the selection panel being treated confidentially.

2.6.5 Relationship between the selection process and the job

High content validity (Gilliland 1995, Kravitz, Stinson and Chavez 1996; Rynes and Connerley 1993) affects how people feel about selection processes. Participants consider it important to be able to see a direct link between the methodology being used and the job. Rynes and Connerley's research revealed methodologies with high content validity to be simulations, both written and oral, and tests that related to the job being applied for, while Kravitz, Stinson and Chavez (1996) concluded that applicants were likely to respond positively to organisations that use interviews, work samples, accomplishment records, job skills tests and references in their personnel selection processes.

2.6.6 Provision of effective feedback

An important consideration for applicants is the explanations of selection decisions - the provision of feedback, with information on their performance during the selection process (Deros, Born and De Witte 2004; Gilliland 1994; Polyhart, Ryan and Bennett 1999). Polyhart, Ryan and Bennett's research (1999) contend that this is a 'catch 22' situation, in that it impacts differently

on successful and unsuccessful applicants. While the provision of a personally detailed explanation of an applicant's performance during selection was seen positively in terms of the perceived fairness of the process, it had a negative effect on applicants' self-perception.

2.6.7 Involvement in the process

Participants react positively to selection processes in which they are able to have active participation (Deros, Born and De Witte 2004; Madigan and Macan 2005), so interactivity between selectors and applicants, and the ability to have an impact on their own and other's behaviours and decisions, is esteemed.

2.6.8 Transparency of the process

Applicants also respond favourably to processes that they consider to be transparent and open (Deros, Born and De Witte 2004; Madigan and Macan 2005). These were seen as ones which give a clear insight into the selection procedure, and are administered in such a way that equal opportunities are available for all candidates through objective, standardised procedures and a competent approach by selectors.

2.6.9 Overview of literature related to effects of selection techniques

Table 6 overviews the research related to the effects that various aspects of selection methodologies have on participants.

Table 6: Literature regarding the effects of personnel selection methodologies on participants

Issue	Literature
Provision of effective feedback	Schuler 1993 Gilliland 1994 1995 Polyhart, Ryan and Bennett 1999 Deros, Born and De Witte 2004
Validity of the process	Rynes and Connerley 1993 Gilliland 1994, 1995 Kravitz, Stinson and Chavez 1996 Madigan and Macan 2005 Deros, Born and De Witte 2004
Transparency of the process	Schuler 1993 Madigan and Macan 2005 Deros, Born and De Witte 2004
Treatment during the process	Gilliland 1995 Madigan and Macan 2005 Deros and De Witte 2001 Deros, Born and De Witte 2004
Active participation in the process	Schuler 1993 Madigan and Macan 2005 Deros, Born and De Witte 2004
The provision of relevant information about the job	Schuler 1993 Deros, Born and De Witte 2004
Effects of the expectation of being hired	Gilliland 1994

By way of summary, the research into applicant perceptions of selection processes reveals that there is some degree of commonality of those characteristics that are viewed positively. These include the following, which appear in the findings of multiple researchers: provision of effective feedback (although this is complicated by the impact on applicants' self-perception), the validity of the process, the transparency and objectivity of the process, humane treatment during the process, the ability to be actively involved in the selection process, and the provision of relevant information about the job as part of the process.

This research into how selection processes and methodologies are perceived by applicants builds on the body of knowledge about the empirical effectiveness of various selection methodologies, as discussed earlier, and gives a further frame of reference with which to consider the principal selection process used in Tasmania.

2.7 Examples of principalship selection practices

As this research is an investigation into principalship selection in a specific context - Tasmania - it is important to have an understanding of the specificities of principalship selection processes as they exist in actuality. These are examined here, both at a national and an international level.

2.7.1 Australia

All Australian states and territories have their own processes for the selection of principals. There is, however, a high degree of commonality in the processes, as all of these incorporate the basic elements of application/resumé, interview and referee reports. An overview of the process used is provided here. The Tasmanian system is located at the end of this section.

2.7.1.1 Australian Capital Territory

Vacancies for all promotable positions are advertised on the Department of Education and Training's website. Each vacancy notification is supported by a series of documents entitled application package, application cover sheet, principal application cover sheet, referees report, and sending in your application. The application package provides information for prospective applicants on the following areas: advice to applicants, equity and diversity in the ACT Department of Education and Training, application cover sheet for appointment/promotion/transfer/temporary transfer, organisation chart for the department, and referee report for administrative positions. Some of the information to potential applicants is generic and quite detailed. For example, the section on how to construct an effective application covers eligibility criteria, considerations before preparing an application, presentation, a suggested application format (suggested approach and things to avoid), what to include in a resumé/curriculum vitae and in a supporting statement, information on the capability framework for principals, as well as selection

criteria against which applicants would be expected to demonstrate merit. As well as this general information, specific and again quite detailed information is also given about the school in which the vacancy has been advertised.

2.7.1.2 Western Australia

In this state, the Recruitment, Selection and Appointment Standard and the Public Sector Management (Examination and Review Procedures) Regulations 2001 allow for the selection of applicants to a pool from which appointments may subsequently be made. Appointment or what is sometimes termed placement, from the pool may occur over a specified period as vacancies arise. In this case the life of the pool is 12 months from the point at which it was created. Selection to the pool does not guarantee an offer of appointment. An offer of appointment will depend upon the availability of the applicant to accept any particular vacancy that is offered, the number of vacancies that become available, and the number of applicants in the pool. Selection panels have chosen to identify applicants selected to the pool as either competitive or highly competitive. This process seeks to balance the stated preferences of the individual applicant, school needs and system needs. The chair of the central selection panel is responsible for determining the process that will be used for placement and the composition of the placement panel. The Merit Selection Working Group considered the composition of the placement panel and determined a group composed of representative(s) of the central panel; a representative from People and Organisational Development; Directors, Schools or Directors Schools and Services or relevant others (such as principals and/or community representatives) would make placement decisions. The procedures state that the process to be used may comprise one or more of the following: discussion with the applicant, review of the applicant's application, interview or referee reports, interview with the applicant, a discussion between members of the central panel and appropriate representatives from the district in which the vacancy exists.

2.7.1.3 South Australia

Principalship, or indeed any, vacancies in the education sector in South Australia, come under the Department of Education and Children's Services. Similarly to the system in the ACT, the Department has a supporting document available on the web. It is entitled Merit Selection Policy and Procedures, and contains detailed information on a variety of pertinent areas including information about the principles of selection in general and the merit principle specifically; and guidelines for establishing the position, the selection panel, the selection process and guidelines for temporary promotable positions.

2.7.1.4 New South Wales

As in the ACT and South Australia, a comprehensive support package for potential applicants for principalship vacancies is accessible online. Unlike other systems in Australia, principals who have completed at least five years in their current school position are eligible to express interest in a vacant principal position of the same type and at the same or a lower salary level; this will occur through a merit selection process from within current, eligible, interested principals. If there are no priority transfer applicants, special fitness appointments or principals returning from leave, the vacant position will be advertised on the Department's website for internal expression of interest (EOI). The advertisement will include the following information: details of the position title, and the school in which the vacancy exists. Details about the school include location, size and composition, special focus programs, priorities, and accessibility for people with disabilities. The advertisement also details specific selection criteria. Potential applicants are required to submit an Expression of Interest form available online.

2.7.1.5 Northern Territory

Principalship selection in the Northern Territory is governed by the Merit Selection Guide, and under the auspices of the Officer of the Commissioner for Public Employment. The Guide provides a comprehensive outline of the procedure to be followed, with detailed information about all aspects of the process: what is the merit principle, composition of the selection panel, the conduct of interviews, other selection methodologies that could be used, the use of referees, evaluating applicants and making a recommendation, writing the selection report, and providing feedback to applicants.

2.7.1.6 Victoria

Again, information for potential applicants is accessible online through the Department of Education, Employment and Training's website. The website is extensive and covers areas such as an overview of the selection process, creating and updating a resumé, and searching and applying for a job. Specific job vacancies, at all levels, are also posted on the website.

Additionally, the Department's publication, *Principal Selection Guidelines*, provides information for potential applicants on areas such as the role of the school council in the selection process, guidelines for selection panels, a statement of roles and accountabilities, instructions to the selection panel, and various forms.

2.7.2 United States of America

There are potentially as many principal selection processes around the world as there are education authorities, whether they are country-wide, state-based, district-based or school-based. Many of these fit within the usual construct – being based around the use of application, interview and referee reports as the underpinning planks of the selection method. Those outlined in

this section are examples of variations on the theme in some way, although they still adhere to the same basic format.

2.7.2.1 Little Lake School District

Madrid (2001) details a selection system used in the Little Lake School District in California. Though it retains the same common elements, it is considerably more extensive than processes commonly used in Tasmania. It includes a greater variety of steps - application, a writing exercise, a portfolio presentation, a staff development presentation, a 'traditional' interview, and a final interview with the superintendent. The process is conducted over two full days, with applicants being assessed at each stage against a set of success indicators that have been agreed upon in advance, and, if successful, invited on to the next stage. Madrid acknowledges that the process is rather complex and labour intensive, but argues that predicting job success requires time and effort, and that the results of the process have been highly regarded by all stakeholders.

2.7.2.2 The Assessment Centre Project

The National Association of Secondary Schools Principals (NASSP) in the United States of America has developed an alternative approach to principal selection. This is the Assessment Centre Project (ACP). The ACP uses multiple activities, including individual and group exercises, to develop a behaviour profile on candidates seeking entry-level or middle-level management positions. The Centre uses standardised procedures, notably simulation exercises, to obtain samples of actual behaviours that are related to duties that would be performed as a principal. Trained assessors observe, record, and prepare written reports about participants' behaviours in a range of exercises. These exercises include: the leaderless group, in-basket, fact-finding and structured interview. After the exercises have been completed, the assessors share their observations in a consensus discussion and rate each participant's level of skill on targeted dimensions. The dimensions have been

deemed as being important for the principalship, and are problem analysis, judgement, organisational ability, decisiveness, leadership, sensitivity, stress tolerance, oral communication, written communication, range of interests, personal motivation and educational values. A final report, based on the consensus discussion, is written, and the director of the Centre gives written and oral feedback to each participant. The success of the Assessment Centres in predicting job success has been measured. It was found that validity (both internal and content) was adequate, and the ratings were found to be a valid predictor of job success.

2.7.2.3 Administrator Perceiver Interview

Again in the United States, a company called Selection Research Incorporated has developed a structured interview, entitled the Administrator Perceiver Interview (API). The purpose of the API is to indicate if an interviewee has the potential to develop a positive working relationship with teachers in their school, as well as the potential to establish a positive, open school climate. The API is based on the use of three types of questions – situational, observational and personal. Using these three types of questions, the candidate's expertise is explored under twelve themes related to the role of school administrator. Scores against each of the themes, as well as a total score, are determined, enabling the selection panel to compare the performance of candidates both globally and on specific criteria.

2.7.2.4 The Administrative Training Programme

The Administrative Training Programme (ATP) of the Montgomery County Public School system in Maryland is a three-part program which involves a career development phase, an administrative internship and a district-run Assessment Centre to assess interns as they complete the training program. The internship is an intensive, on-the-job training program, in which a district

team and their principal systematically evaluate interns. Based on their performance, interns are either offered a position or not offered one.

2.7.2.5 Fairfax County process

Fairfax County in Virginia uses a selection process incorporating the usual elements of application, interview and referee reports. However, as a part of their process, they formally invite comment from staff and parents at the school where the vacancy exists and use a compilation of that information to screen candidate resumés and develop interview questions (see Appendix B).

2.7.2.6 Broward County process

Broward County in Florida utilises a Principal Selection Process that has three main elements an eligibility list, a vacancy screening, and a vacancy interview. The eligibility list is developed independent of any particular vacancies, and shows the names of potential applicants for principalship vacancies who have demonstrated ability to achieve certain selection criteria. The vacancy screening rates eligible candidates against the specific requirements of each vacancy. This is followed by the vacancy interview, which is conducted with those candidates judged to be the most eligible after the screen.

The following programs, all based in the United States, while not strictly selection methodologies in their own right, form part of the push to increase the skills and confidence of potential principalship candidates and therefore the quantity and quality of applicant fields.

2.7.2.7 New York City (NYC) Leadership Academy

In 2003, the NYC Leadership Academy was established in New York City, as part of the Children First reforms, in response to the belief that the development and support of effective school principals is essential to the overall transformation of New York City's schools. It has three components: Aspiring Principals Program (APP), First Year Support (FYS) and Year Two Support (Y2S). Of most relevance to this research is the APP program, which recruits, selects and trains aspiring principals for the New York City school system. Participants in the program attend two intensive summer sessions and take part in a year-long residency in New York City public schools under the guidance of an experienced Mentor Principal, with the aim of developing their instructional leadership capacity.

2.7.2.8 Boston School Leadership Institute

Similarly, the Boston School Leadership Institute (BSLI) offers three programs: Exploring the Principalship, the Boston Principal Fellowship, and the New Principal Support System. Of most relevance to this research is the Principal Fellowship program, which is a full-year, four-day-per-week residency program in which participants are matched up with experienced principals. On the fifth day of the week participants undertake seminars and course work focused on school improvement and school leadership. Participants in the program receive a full-time salary for the full year, in return for a three-year commitment to the Boston Public Schools upon completion of the program. Consideration is given in principal and assistant principal selection processes for successful Principal Fellows.

2.7.2.9 The Administrative Intern Programme

The Administrative Intern Programme (AIP) in Hayward Unified School District, California, began in 1979. At each stage of the selection process, candidates who pass progress on to the next stage. The elements of the process are written letters of application and the completion of problem exercises, thirty-minute interviews, and another set of problems. If candidates pass, they are admitted to the AIP. The AIP includes a variety of opportunities for training, such as school visits, observations, conferences, workshops, interviews, substituting for current principals, attendance at board and council meetings, and formal training sessions. Its organisers contend that cost has been slight when compared with the extensive benefits gained by the increased competence of prospective principals.

2.7.3 Overview of literature related to principal selection practices

The processes and programs discussed above have been included in this review because they bring something different to the principal selection

process that is not currently being used in the Tasmanian context. Table 7 overviews these selection practices.

Table 7: Overview of various principalship selection methodologies

Element	Location
Pre-principal training and development	Administrative Training Program, Maryland NYC Leadership Academy, New York Boston School Leadership Institute, Boston Administrative Intern Program, California
Longitudinal model	Little Lake School District, California Assessment Centre Project, United States Selection into Administrative Intern Program, California
Assessing candidate skills against specific criteria	Administrator Perceiver Interview, United States Little Lake School District, California
Seeking input from community	Fairfax County, Virginia
Pre-established lists of eligible candidates	Broward County, Florida

2.8 Principal selection in Tasmania

The process used in Tasmania is inherently the same as that used in other parts of Australia, being based on the use of written application, interview and referee reports as the process elements.

Principalship and other vacancies within the Department of Education, are advertised both in hard copy - through the Tasmanian State Services Gazette - and online - through the Department's website. The advertisement for any given principalship vacancy contains specific information about the position including the level of the school - which relates to the number of students in the school and the salary that the position attracts - and the contact person from whom potential applicants can seek additional information. During the period of time that this research covers, the advertisement also stated the type of application format that the selection panel had specified in terms of word limit and whether or not curriculum vitae was required.

Extensive supporting documentation is available to potential applicants, and covers areas such as statement of duties - which includes the selection criteria; cover page - which asks for biographical data; and guidelines to applicants - which includes advice on requirements for the position, merit

selection, information on selection panels, verification of claims, interviews, selection panel report, post-selection counselling and review of decisions (see Appendix F).

The research discussed above is mixed in terms of the perceived effectiveness of the three components of the principal selection process in Tasmania. Two methodologies used in the Tasmanian principal selection process - reference checks and interviews - attracted mixed responses, with the former being positively perceived; perceptions of interviews varied according to the content of the interview and the nature of the interviewer. The research also highlighted the effect that participation in the type of selection process used in Tasmania can have on applicants – covering in particular applicant perception of the validity and transparency of the process, their participation in the process and the provision of effective feedback on their performance.

2.9 Summary

The literature review sought to provide a base upon which to site the research, by examining what the current thinking is about principal selection and related issues. Personnel selection methodologies can be looked at in a number of ways, including, as most relevant to this investigation, their empirical effectiveness (i.e: do they work) and the effect they have on applicants. Thus, the process used to select principals is not only important because of the need to have effective principals, but also because it has been shown to have an adverse effect on this aim: it can, for a variety of reasons, act as a deterrent for people applying for principalship vacancies.

Table 8 represents the major themes that emerged from the literature regarding the issue of principalship selection. It covers a number of sub-themes – the importance of the role of the principal; declining fields of applicants for principalship vacancies; possible reasons why this is occurring; possible reasons for dissatisfaction with the selection process; aspects of the selection process that applicants consider to be important; and elements of

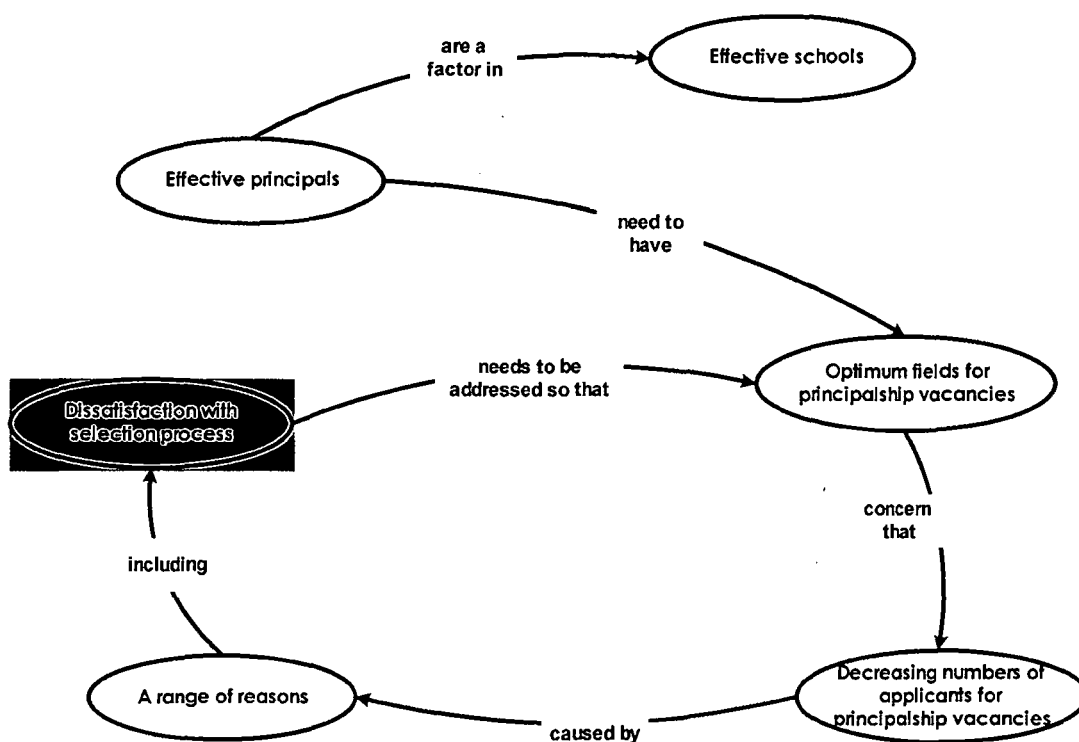
selection methodologies that differ in some way to the process used in Tasmania.

Table 8: Major themes in the literature related to principalship selection

Importance of the role of the principal	Concern over decline over numbers of applicants for the principalship	Reasons for the decline	Dissatisfactions with the selection process	Aspects of the process considered important to applicants	Elements of alternative selection methodologies
Generally Improving student learning Facilitating high performing schools	Overall In specific contexts Nationally Internationally	Dissatisfaction with the selection process Impact of the position on personal life Demands of the position Insufficient salary Loss of close relationships with students and staff Perceived effect of gender principalship Contextual issues about the school	Loss of confidence in merit selection Concerns about panel competency Concerns about the transparency and fairness of the process Lack of constructive feedback Time-consuming nature of the process Power of the superintendent Validity concerns Complexity of the process Consistency issues Trauma caused by the process Rigidity of the process Gender issues Perception that 'known' applicants are advantaged Emphasis on pre-established criteria Unwritten codes of not applying in certain circumstances Reliance on interview and/or application Perception that the outcome of a principalship vacancy is pre-determined Costs of the process	Provision of effective feedback Validity of the process Transparency of the process Treatment during the process Active participation in the process Provision of relevant information about the job Effects of the expectation of being hired	Pre-principal training and development Longitudinal model of selection Assessing candidate skills against specific criteria Seeking input from community Pre-established lists of eligible candidates

The following diagram is a representation of the inter-relationships between the major themes drawn out in this literature review. It demonstrates the links that researchers have found between effective schools and effective principals, and proposes that because of the importance of the principal's role, it is desirable to have optimum fields of candidates for principalship vacancies; it shows that research has uncovered a decrease in the numbers of people applying for principalship vacancies and the various reasons why this is occurring – one of which is perceptions of the selection process (the basis of this study); and proposes the need for this to be addressed in order to have a positive effect on applicant numbers.

Figure 1: Connections between elements of the literature review



This research is focused on the views of a group of people involved in the principal selection process in a specific context - the Tasmanian Department of Education. Semi-structured interviews were used as the means of data collection. This enabled the researcher to delve deeply into people's views,

and so really explore the issue, with the aim of adding to the growing body of knowledge about principalship selection generally, and to greatly expand the limited amount of information available on the Tasmanian context.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology used to investigate the research questions. It looks at the formulation of the research focus; and the research design, including a rationale of why this was chosen, the data collection and analysis, and considerations of the credibility of the research findings.

3.1 Research design

3.1.1 Considerations underpinning the research

The following beliefs about the nature of the research guided the researcher's choice of design.

1. The topic chosen was of a personal nature, asking participants to consider their own experiences and discuss viewpoints that were inherently private, and likely to be emotive. Time to explore these viewpoints was considered to be important, as it was felt that a deeper discussion would occur if participants had enough time to really reflect on their responses.
2. It was considered important that the participants in the research were volunteers rather than conscripts, so that they were more likely to be those who were keen to share their views on the topic. Because of this, an invitation to participate in the research was deemed important.
3. It was considered important that the views and beliefs described were guided by current experience rather than only something that had happened in the past, so current participants in selection processes were chosen.
4. The need for anonymity was considered to be crucial, so that participants could feel free to express their true thoughts without fear of any ramifications, whether these be real or perceived, so processes needed to be put in place to ensure that this occurred.

3.1.2 Quantitative or qualitative research?

In considering the question of research design, a researcher is faced with two broad types of research – qualitative or quantitative.

Burns (2000) notes that quantitative research is a form of scientific investigation and is characterised by control, operational definition, replication, and hypothesis testing. While, he contends, its strengths lie in its precision and control, and the ability to make statements about causes and effect of the phenomena under investigation, there are limitations of this type of research when working with human subjects, since '... humans are far more complex than the inert matter that is studied in physical sciences'. (2000:9)

Burns goes on to state that:

Qualitative forms of investigation tend to be based on a recognition of the importance of the subjective, experiential 'lifeworld' of human beings ... the task of the qualitative methodologist is to capture what people say and do as a product of how they interpret the complexity of their world, to understand events from the viewpoints of the participants. (2000:11)

Additionally:

Qualitative researchers believe that since humans are conscious of their own behaviour, the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of their informants is vital ... the qualitative researcher is not concerned with objective truth, but rather with the truth as the informant sees it. (2000:388)

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that qualitative methodology allows a researcher to get closer to a person's perspective through interviewing and/or observation, while quantitative methodology is constrained by a reliance on more remote, empirical, inferential materials. Further, they opine that qualitative researchers see value in rich descriptions of a person's world and

their views about it, while quantitative researchers are less interested in this level of detail. Silverman's (2001) view, that qualitative research is predicated on the assumption that it can provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena than that provided by purely quantitative data, concurs with this.

More specifically, the research design was guided by what Rubin and Rubin (2005) refer to as the interpretive constructionist approach:

To interpretive constructionist researchers, how people view an object or event and the meaning that they attribute to it is what is important ... constructionists expect people to see somewhat different things, examine them through distinct lenses, and come to somewhat different conclusions. In this sense, multiple or even conflicting versions of the same event or object can be true at the same time ... constructionist researchers try to elicit the interviewee's views of their world. (2005:28–29)

Having chosen a topic of a nature personal to potential participants, and one that required uncovering participants' view of a phenomenon, rather than an empirical truth about it (if in fact such a thing existed), a qualitative method of enquiry, based on an interpretative constructionist approach, was chosen.

3.1.3 Interviews as the method of data-collection

The purpose of interviewing then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit (Patton 1990:278).

Within the sphere of qualitative research, a number of data collection options are available to the researcher. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) note the major options: interview, observation, reading material culture and its records, visual methods such as video and photography, biographical experiences, and personal experiences.

Within the qualitative research construct, the researcher chose to use the interview as a data collection method, because:

If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk to them? ... the qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover the lived world (Kvale 1996:1).

And:

Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities. (Stake 1995:64)

And, as is somewhat challengingly proposed by Fontana and Frey:

... to learn about people, we must treat them as people, and they to help us create accounts of our lives. As long as many researchers continue to treat respondents as unimportant, faceless individuals whose only contribution is to fill in one more boxed response, the answers we, as researchers, will get will be commensurable with the questions we ask and with the way we ask them ... the question must be asked person-to-person if we want it to be answered fully. (2000:668)

As well, the researcher was guided by the opinions of authors such as Burns (2000), Stake (1995), Kvale (1996), Patton (1990), and Mischler (1986), in viewing the numerous strengths that interviews offered as a method of data collection. The face-to-face nature of the interview has a number of advantages: it allows for the development of rapport between interviewer and interviewee; it facilitates a deep exploration of a topic; it reduces the potential confusion over the intent of both questions and answers because clarification can be sought by both researcher and interviewee; there is greater flexibility for the researcher to adjust the interview in response to cues and responses from the participant, as well as for the interviewee to expand on his/her thoughts and views; and non-verbal factors such as facial expression and other body language can be observed and factored in to data analysis. For

these reasons, interviews usually yield the richest data, and were deemed by the researcher to be the most effective method of collecting the type of data needed to address the research questions that had been developed.

3.1.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

Within the interview-as-data collection paradigm, a number of possibilities exist, including formal/structured, informal or semi-structured.

The researcher was guided by the views of a number of authors, notably Kvale (1996), Stake (1995), and Rubin and Rubin (2005), in selecting the semi-structured interview — termed the ‘qualitative research interview’ by Kvale, the ‘qualitative interview’ by Stake, and the ‘responsive interview’ by Rubin and Rubin — as the particular method of data collection. This type of interview is used to describe and understand the lived world of the subjects, to develop themes from that, and to describe and understand those themes. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because, in essence, they would allow for a greater exploration of the theme, due to the possibility of follow-up and probing questions being incorporated as a part of the interview process.

The nature of a semi-structured interview facilitates the development of a deep, personal conversation, during which lived experiences and personal perspectives can be explored. As a principal herself, the researcher had personal experiences with the principal selection process, and was mindful that these did not influence the research in any way other than had been intended; that is, in the initial selection of topic. It was critical to the investigation that the data collected were only the views and perceptions of the research participants; not the result of any impact of the words or actions of the researcher on these views and perceptions. A high level self-monitoring during the conduct of interviews, and of self-reflection at their conclusion, was engaged in by the researcher to ensure that this was the case during the conduct of the investigation.

3.1.4 The interview schedule

In keeping with the construct of a semi-structured or qualitative research, interview, a broad schedule of questions was adopted (see Table 9). As Stake says:

... each interviewee is expected to have had unique experiences, special stories to tell. The qualitative interviewer should arrive with a short list of issue-oriented questions ... the purpose for the most part is not to get simple yes or no answers but description of an episode, a linkage, an explanation. (1995:65)

It should be noted however, that while the researcher had the framework in mind and adhered to it over the course of the interview, individual interviews often developed their own 'life' and 'strayed' into non-interview-schedule areas, leading to the researcher asking non-interview-schedule questions to further probe responses, or to re-phrase schedule-interview questions.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) emphasised the need for depth of data collection. Dana, Kelsay, Thomas and Tippins' paper aimed to provide researchers with 'the technical skills needed to unlock the internal perspectives of their informants' (1992:13). Drawing on the work of these, and other researchers, the researcher structured the interviews so that the questions were short and precise, rather than complex, and with sub-questions embedded in them (see Table 9). Only one question was asked at a time, and each question required a thoughtful response on the part of the interviewee. The researcher was ready with probing or follow-up questions if needed, and silence/wait time was utilised to ensure that participants had the time needed to think more deeply. Reflective statements were used to ensure that the meaning of responses was correct, and potentially controversial issues were explored with sensitivity.

At all stages in the interview, the researcher was ready to invite interviewees to 'tell me some more about that' in order to explore an idea or an issue more deeply. As Rubin and Rubin assert:

To achieve richness and depth of understanding, those engaged in qualitative interviews listen for and then explore key words, ideas, and themes using follow-up questions to encourage the interviewee to expand on what he or she has said that the researcher feels is important to the research. (2005:13)

Table 9 overviews the planned interview schedule.

Table 9: Overview of interview schedule

Interview section	Planned question, statement	Probe/extension
Introduction, setting the scene	Thanks for participating. Tell me about your previous experiences with the principal selection process.	In what capacity was that participation? Do you think there have been many changes in the process?
Views on the process	Let's talk about the process for selecting principals. Looking first at the different part of the process. What are your thoughts on the application element?	What do you see as its strengths, or advantages? What do you see as its weaknesses, or disadvantages?
Views on the process	Let's look now at the interview component of the process – what are your thoughts on that?	What do you see as its strengths, or advantages? What do you see as its weaknesses, or disadvantages?
Views on the process	Let's look at referee reports. What are your thoughts on that part of the process?	What do you see as its strengths, or advantages? What do you see as its weaknesses, or disadvantages?
Views on the process	Let's look now at the post-selection counselling component. What are your thoughts that?	What do you see as its strengths, or advantages? What do you see as its weaknesses, or disadvantages?
Views on the process	Let's look now at the process as a whole.	The process aims to get the best person for the job. What are your thoughts on that? Is there anything you would like to say that you haven't already covered?
Conclusion	Is there anything else you would like to add? Thanks again for participating.	

3.2 The role of the researcher

In using interviews as the data-collection method, the researcher becomes the research instrument (Patton 1990; Kvale 1996; Cresswell 1998; etc.). Because of this, Kvale opines, '... the importance of the researcher as a person is magnified ...' (1996:117). While there are advantages to this design, the researcher was mindful of the concept of researcher bias, and was guided

by Rubin and Rubin's view that, while the empathy created by an interviewer is advantageous because it encourages people to talk:

... active involvement [on the part of the researcher] can also create problems as your own emotions and biases can influence what you ask and how your interviewee responds. To be a successful interviewer, you have to sensitize yourself to these biases and learn to compensate for your own slant. (2005:31–32)

Patton refers to the need for qualitative researchers to display empathic neutrality (1990:58) – a balance between conveying an interest in and caring towards people, and remaining non-judgemental about their words and actions during data collection. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) contend that the words and actions of an interviewer have an effect on the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, and therefore the ways that research participants discuss their views and experiences.

The researcher was continually self-reflective during the conduct of the research, being mindful of her own personal experiences, and that these did not influence the direction of either the interviews themselves or the interpretation of the data collected. In essence, a stance of 'empathic neutrality' was adopted.

The researcher was guided by this stance throughout the conduct of each interview, as well as by Kvale's (1996) contention that researchers need to embody a number of key interpersonal characteristics, including honesty, fairness, knowledge of ethical considerations, and experience, and that the research being undertaken is as controlled and verified as possible and yields knowledge that is worth knowing.

3.3 Ethical issues

Within any research, consideration needs to be given to the ethics of its conduct. The ethical issues involved in research involving human participants

are consequences of participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and the role of the researcher. These are discussed below.

3.3.1 Consequences of participation

A basic premise of qualitative research is that no harm should result to participants from their involvement in research (eg: Patton 1990; Kvale 1996; Babbie 2004). Kvale refers to this as being the ethical principle of beneficence, and goes on to state that researchers are often surprised by the positive reactions they have had from participants in their research because:

Just listening to what people have to say for an extended period of time, as well as the quality of the listening, can make the interview a unique experience. The interview researcher can thus offer benefits to the subjects through their participation in the investigation. (1996:116)

This proved to be the case with this research, as illustrated by the comment below from a participant in the research:

I would like to say thank you for doing this. I've been waiting a long time for someone to do it, to find out what people really think about the process. (Series D, 2004)

Researchers in the field, including Patton (1990) and Kvale (1996), caution others using interviews as their method of data collection that the interpersonal closeness developed between the interviewee and interviewer can lead to disclosures being made by interviewees that they later regret. As Patton asserts:

When interviewees are open and willing to

confidentiality.

3.3.2 Informed consent

Babbie (2004) contends that the ethical construct of non-harm to participants has become formalised in the construct of informed consent. Fontana and

Appendix D) at the beginning of each interview, and ensured that they had an understanding of its contents before signing it.

3.3.3 Confidentiality

Mischler (1986) argues that the provision of confidentiality is important when:

... respondents wish to control the conditions under which their opinions will be made public; they want to be responsible for choosing where and when and to whom they will say what they think and feel. (1986:124–125).

He goes on to state that this is most important in instances such as references to '... subordinates' attitudes about their superiors in work settings' (1986:125), which has similarities to the research in this study, and says that:

... confidentiality is consistent with the aim of empowering respondents in the sense that they retain control over the circumstances under which their personal views enter into the discourse with others in their social worlds. (1986:125)

This position was particularly pertinent to this research because participants' views of a significant aspect of their work-world was the focus of the research, and because their views would be made public — albeit in a way that did everything to safeguard their anonymity.

Punch (1994) asserts that there is an expectation that safeguards should be used to protect the privacy and identity of research subjects, and that the major safeguard used against invasion of privacy is the assurance of confidentiality. Christians (2000) links the provision of confidentiality to the important need to safeguard against unwanted exposure. Burns (2000) contends that it is usually possible to assure interview participants of confidentiality and this is accomplished when researchers know who interviewees are and promise not to reveal this information. Kvale's discussion of the issue of confidentiality is similar to this when he says that

'confidentiality in research implies that private data identifying the subjects will not be reported' (1996:114).

In this study, confidentiality was paramount because of the personal nature of the research, and the perception that participants had of the potentially controversial points of view that they expressed. Unwanted exposure was a consideration for interviewees, exemplified by the frequency of occasions on which participants asked if they would be identified in the research, often stating that they wanted to remain anonymous so that they could discuss what they really felt about the selection process.

Confidentiality was maintained in a number of ways. The audiotapes of interviews and transcriptions that were made of these were kept secure in the researcher's home. Any further written versions of the work, including thematic analyses, drafts and final versions of the research did not contain any identifying references to individual participants. Verbatim quotes from participants in the final report identify the year in which the particular selection process of which the person was a participant took place, but contain no further identifiers.

3.4 Credibility of the research

A crucial consideration during the research was that the research design, data collection, thematic development and subsequent reporting of data all be guided by the need for credibility. Silverman (2001) opines:

If qualitative research is to be judged by whether it produces valid knowledge, we should properly ask highly critical questions about any piece of research. And these questions should be no less probing and critical than we ask about any quantitative study. (2001:221)

This research meets Silverman's criteria in a number of ways, and as such is believed to be credible. The method (qualitative interviewing) was deliberately chosen in order to elicit in-depth, thoughtful responses about the chosen

topic, which was inherently a personal one. The conduct of the interviews was done in a way that recognised the sensitivity of the topic under discussion. A clear connection to the existing body of knowledge was established through a review of existing literature on the topic and related areas. This chapter details the reasons behind participant selection and data collection and analysis. Data collection and record-keeping were systematic, as was the data analysis, which was undertaken using accepted procedures.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) contend that:

the credibility of your findings is enhanced if you make sure that you have interviewed individuals who reflect a variety of perspectives. The philosophy of responsive interviewing suggests that reality is complex; to accurately portray that complexity, you need to gather contradictory or overlapping perceptions and nuanced understandings that different individuals hold. (2005:67)

This research adhered to this by having participants who came to the research from a number of different roles in the selection process – panel member, panel Chair, applicant. As well, as can be seen in Chapter Five, the results show different perspectives of the same aspect of the process. This was true of many of the themes that were drawn from the data collected.

Overall credibility was further increased in the following three ways. Firstly, an in-depth reflection was undertaken by the researcher at the conclusion of the first round of interviews. This aimed to identify any faults in the early methodology design and refine the method in order to eliminate them. Secondly, a tape recorder was used to record the interviews, rather than relying on the shorthand skills of the researcher. This was done to reduce data-recording errors. Thirdly, 'member checking' (Stake 1995:115) was carried out — transcribed versions of the interviews were discussed with a sample of respondents (not all, as this would have been time-prohibitive) to ensure the accuracy of this step of the process.

Validity refers to how well the data gathering measures what it was intended to. Burns (2000) suggests that validity in research that is based on questionnaires or interviews is affected by two issues: the level of importance that the participant ascribes to the topic, and the degree of confidence that a research participant has in the provision of anonymity. He contends that these two variables are likely to encourage participants' openness and honesty, and therefore increase the validity of the research.

Because participation in this research was both voluntary, and solicited in an anonymous way that did not exert any pressure for participation, this increased the likelihood that participants were those who considered the topic to be important.

The researcher took a number of steps to safeguard anonymity, all of which were explained to participants so that they were aware of this. The initial step in seeking to establish a research partnership between researcher and participant was done in such a way that at this point in the process, the researcher did not know the identity of these people. Having gained approval from the Chairperson of a selection panel to use that panel as part of the research study, letters inviting participation were sent out by the Human Resource (HR) Branch of the Tasmanian Department of Education to all applicants for that principalship vacancy. It was only when people contacted the researcher to indicate their willingness to participate in the research that she became aware of their identity. In the written report, two steps have been taken to disguise the identity of research participants: specific panels have not been identified by potentially identifying markers such as name of school, type of school, and specific time of vacancy; and specific participants have not been identified by potentially identifying markers such as gender, age, or vacancy panel.

3.5 Participant overview

Rubin and Rubin (2005) advise that researchers choose participants who know their culture well and are able to explain it. In adhering to this, and to

two of the guiding principles of this research study (volunteerism, and currency of experience), it was decided to investigate principal selection panels that were in place at the time of the research. A number of steps had to take place in order for that to occur:

1. the granting of Ethics Approval from both the University of Tasmania and the Department of Education;
2. the development of a process with HR Branch for the researcher to anonymously invite potential interviewees to participate in the research (Letter to Potential Participants (see Appendix C);
3. seeking specific approval to use a panel for research from the Chairs of panels;
4. an anonymous written approach (see above) to potential participants; and
5. contact with participants to enable the research to begin.

In considering how many people to interview, the researcher was guided by the concepts of completeness and saturation point. Rubin and Rubin's (2005) notion of completeness refers to the need for researchers to continue to undertake interviews until they have an understanding of the topic under investigation. Saturation point (Morse 1994; Glaser and Strauss 1967, cited in Rubin and Rubin 2005) is reached when additional interviews add little to what has already been learned, but rather concur with and confirm existing data. This determined the researcher's decision to cease data collection at the conclusion of the fifth selection panel, when it became apparent that views that had been expressed by earlier participants were being echoed by these interviewees.

The research design was based on volunteerism. This was true of every level, beginning with first gaining permission from a Panel Chair to use 'their' panel as part of the research. At times, this was not given, and the researcher was required to wait until a new principalship vacancy was declared, a selection panel convened, and a new Panel Chair could be approached for permission. Having gained permission, the research design necessitated a waiting period from the time that letters were sent out by HR Branch until willing participants contacted the researcher. It was this aspect of the research design that was

both useful (in terms of assuring anonymity and volunteerism) and problematic (in terms of the uptake of invitation to participate).

Five individual selection panels were used, over the period from the beginning of term three (June) 2003 until the end of term three (December) 2004. There was a total of twenty-one individual respondents.

The five principalship vacancies were diverse in nature, comprising a spread across all areas of the state, and a mixture of primary, high and district high schools. For reasons of confidentiality, the principalship vacancy for which the panels were constructed is not referred to. Rather, they are given a designated 'series' identifier (the letters A – E) and the year in which they occurred.

Research participants were a mixture of male and female, from a range of ages, and a range of experiences with principal selection panels (some being existing principals and some not). The participants in the research had come into the study because they were occupying one of three roles: panel member, panel Chair or applicant.

It became apparent early in the data collection, however, that it was difficult for research participants to confine their comments to the current role that they were occupying in the particular panel with which they were involved. Their comments tended to be a reflection of the sum total of their experiences and beliefs. At times, comments were made which referred to a viewpoint of a particular role, and where this was the case, this is stated.

The outcome of a selection process is that there will be one person who is successful in 'winning' the advertised position, and others who are not. Some research literature (see section 2.6.3 above) indicates that this has an impact on how applicants perceive the selection process. This factor was considered by the researcher, and interviews were conducted in the period of time between submission of written application and the announcement of the outcome of selection processes.

3.6 Analysis of the data

Rubin and Rubin contend that:

Qualitative analysis is not about mere counting or providing numeric summaries. Instead, the objective is to discover variation, portray shades of meaning, and examine complexity. The goals of the analysis are to reflect the complexity of human interaction by portraying it in the words of the interviewees ... and to make that complexity understandable to others. (2005:202)

They also suggest that in qualitative research, data analysis is ongoing throughout the entire research process, rather than something left until the data has been collected. Mindful of this, the researcher began, in the early interviews, to determine common threads, and to listen for both confirmatory and contradictory examples of these in subsequent interviews. At the end of each interview, the researcher reflected on what had been learned, providing both new information and highlighting gaps. This information was used to inform subsequent interviews.

In analysing the data, the researcher was guided by the work of Huberman and Miles (1994), and Rubin and Rubin (2005). Huberman and Miles (1994) propose four interlinked steps in the analysis of qualitative research data: data collection, data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction occurs both prior to, and following, the collection of data. Prior to data collection, it involves making decisions about the conceptual framework, the research questions and the instrument/s that will be used for data collection instruments. Following data collection, it involves further reducing the data collected by methods such as coding, theme development, summaries, etc. Data display occurs when the researcher views the reduced data in order to think about its meaning, and to undertake the final step of drawing meanings from, and conclusions about, what the data says.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest that the data should be analysed to determine concepts contained in the data, which, in turn, leads to a development of themes. The authors propose a number of ways that concepts or themes can emerge, including: the repetition of key words or phrases used by interviewees, complementary or contradictory concepts appearing across a number of interviews, and the vividness or strength of the language used by participants.

Prior to data collection, the decision was made to use semi-structured, qualitative research interviews as the data collection device and a series of questions were developed. As interviews were conducted, themes began to emerge – both within individual interviews and across the growing body of data collected. These themes were the effectiveness or not of the selection process, the fairness or unfairness of the process and the costs associated with it. As increasing numbers of interviews were conducted, the researcher listened for instances of the existence of these themes, but also for instances of contradictory evidence or additional themes. To ensure that these were valid interpretations of the themes, the researcher immersed herself in the data, reading and re-reading the transcriptions and engaging in repeated listening to the taped interviews, because, as Mischler states, ‘the experience of transcribing is ... likely to convince investigators of the need for repeated listenings to ensure the most accurate transcript possible...’ (1986:49). During these listenings, the researcher was guided by Rubin and Rubin’s advice on observing both the strength of the language used as well as the number of times a theme/issue was evidenced.

The data, presented in the following chapter, is organised into the themes outlined above, and contains numerous direct quotes from interviewees because, as Patton asserts:

Direct quotations are a basic source of raw data in qualitative inquiry, revealing respondents’ depth of emotion, the way they have organised their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions. (1990:24)

3.7 Summary

Following the identification of the research area, an extensive literature review was used to inform the development of specific research questions. A semi-structured interview format was chosen as the most appropriate research instrument to collect the data. Data was collected in the period from term three 2003 to term three 2004. Analysis of the data was conducted using a thematic approach. A detailed description of the findings from the data is discussed in Chapter Four. The conclusions drawn from these findings, as well as implications for future research are presented in the concluding Chapter Five.

Chapter Four: Results

The semi-structured nature of the interviews (see Table 9) invited participants in the research to comment on both the selection process as a whole as well as the individual component parts, application, interview, verification (including referee reports, verification of claims and site visits), and post-selection counselling.

An analysis of the data collected revealed three distinct themes, which appeared across all the elements of the current process used to select principals in the Tasmanian Department of Education, as well as when the process was viewed in its totality. These were effectiveness, fairness and cost.

Overall, as shown by table 10, respondents had the predominant view that the process is not effective, is not fair and is too costly. These views were true both of the process as a whole, and for most of its individual component parts — application, interview, the elements of verification, and post-selection counselling.

Table 10: Numerical overview of thematic comments

	Negative aspects	Positive aspects	Total
Effectiveness	110	52	162
Fairness	26	8	34
Cost	25	3	28
Total	161	63	224

In this chapter, each theme is discussed in the negative and the positive, and in terms of both the elements of the process and the process as a whole (for example, whether applications were considered to be effective or not effective). Within each theme, a number of sub-themes emerged.

4.1 Effectiveness

Of the three broad themes that categorised responses, the one of effectiveness attracted by far the most comment. In fact, over three times as many comments were made about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the process than about its fairness and cost combined. In comparison to the other themes of fairness and cost, quite a few positive comments were made in relation to the effectiveness of the process for a variety of reasons. Interestingly, this was true of some of the component parts of the process, such as application, interview, and post-selection counselling, but not when people reflected on the effectiveness of the process as a whole, which was only seen in a negative light.

4.1.1 The effectiveness/application dimension

Participants had very divergent views on the effectiveness of the application component of the selection process. However, there was a clear trend, in that the majority of comments were about its lack of effectiveness.

A number of sub-themes were discernible within the comments made about the application part of the process: concerns about the issue of word limits; whose work was being judged; issues of consistency; the range of skills needed by applicants for principalship positions; the use of Curriculum Vitae (CVs); what is being judged; and providing an opportunity for professional learning.

4.1.1.1 Word limits

An evolving aspect of the principal selection process is that of word limits on applications. At one time, there were no limits imposed on the number of words an applicant could write; then a 3000 word limit was imposed, which was fairly strictly adhered to; after which, individual panels could specify how many words they wanted in applications. It is this construct (no word limits/imposition of set/variable word limits) that research participants comment on in this study. Interestingly, at the present time (after the timeframe of data collection) word limits are again no longer set. The issue of word limits attracted considerable comment, both in terms of how effective (or not) it made the process (as discussed here) and how fair or otherwise (see section 4.2.1.2).

The issue of word limits was the one that attracted the most comment from respondents in their discussion about the application part of the selection process. It would seem that this is an issue particular to the Tasmanian context at this particular point in time. It has no links to other research findings either nationally or internationally.

The fact that panels could ask for an application to be written in a specified number of words was a contentious one. For some interviewees, the fact that panels can, and do, impose word limits on applications made them ineffective in their view.

The imposition of a word limit is all about bureaucratizing the whole thing, making it simple, making it easy, making it easy to make a superficial judgement about who is and who isn't going to be a successful candidate. Therefore we would rule you out based on the length of your application, if it doesn't conform to the stated word limit. If you write a 500-word application, then maybe you are very concise, if you can do it well in that space. Maybe that would be an advantage to you, or maybe in 3000 words you can put a little bit more of yourself in there, or with 5000 words, that's more

possible. 5000 words doesn't make a bad application, it just makes a longer application. It is just up to the person who is reading it to interpret whether or not that constitutes a bad application or a good application. (Series C, 2003)

Asking for any sort of word limit is about consistency. Consistency really is only expediency and the Department has argued that expediency is not what they are after. If applications are all the same size, then it means that the panel's job is easier, and they can do it quicker. But this is counter to what the guidelines actually state explicitly as being their purpose – to get the best person for the job. Because of that, you can't say that any word limit is a reasonable thing to have. (Series D, 2004)

While some interviewees viewed the imposition of word limits negatively, for some it was a positive aspect of the process. This interviewee, for example, considered that limiting the size of applications made the task of comparing them more achievable for panel members.

I do understand the reason for a word limit. I've sat on panels where there were huge applications presented. I remember reading one that was 23 pages. If you are looking at say 35 applicants for a position, then really it becomes very difficult for the panel to make a judgement from the sheer volume of reading and the time frame that you have to do it in. Restricting the word limits in applications makes it a more manageable task for the panel. (Series D, 2004)

The issue related to applications that attracted the most comment overall, in terms of effectiveness, was that of low word limits.

A considerable number of interviewees expressed the view that applications were not effective because of the imposition of low word limits. Their responses indicated a feeling that this restricted a person's capacity to write

an effective application. This was true, both when people considered this issue from the perspective as an applicant, and as a panel member.

You don't see 'the self' in there. You only see some sort of generic description of what, you know, they think the perfect principal may look like when the written piece is so short. (Series D, 2004)

How can I really express what I'm going to do in a school in 500 words? (Series B, 2003)

This application was 1000 words only. You can't say very much in 1000 words. Particularly when the expectation is that you will project into the role as well as cover the set criteria. So you've got about 600 words to cover what you've done in the last six years and 400 words to say what you'd like to do if you got the position. It's very hard. (Series D, 2004)

Having lower word limits is really challenging. It's difficult to pack as much meaning as possible in only a few words. The most recent position I applied for used a 1000 word format and I would have liked a higher word limit in order to 'sell' myself better. (Series A, 2003)

While the imposition of lower word limits was problematic for many people, there were some dissenting voices which considered that the lower word limit was valid and made the application part of the process more effective.

I don't see the lower word limit as a disadvantage. Just recently I had to write a 1000-word application and I remember thinking at the time, 'thank goodness I only have to write 1000 words' because it was near the end of the year and things were frantically busy. Then I went through the phase of thinking, 'how am I ever going to say all the things I need to in 1000 words'? I worried that I would not be able to get down onto paper what you hope is the richness of your experiences, skills etc. However, for the level of position I was applying for, it was more than reasonable that I should be

able to write 1000 words that I could quite clearly say what needed to be said. (Series E, 2004)

I find that the shorter application length really focuses people's thinking and requires them to really articulate their position in relation to the current context. (Series E, 2004)

We used to have these massive tomes that people wrote. I don't think they were useful. In my view, it is no harder to get a picture of someone in 3000 words than it is in 15000. (Series A, 2003)

For a number of people, the issue of panels being able to ask for different word limits in applications was hugely problematic. In essence, their concerns revolved around how much more work was involved in having to write a completely new application for separate jobs that were advertised at around the same time, instead of being able to tinker with one that they already had.

There is a disadvantage in panels being able to ask for different lengths, especially for an applicant who is applying for a number of positions over a short period. That may mean that they might have to write to three different word limits and formats. This will increase their workload, on top of their existing workload in their school, which increases the pressure on them and may lead them to saying that they can't put their best foot forward. (Series E, 2004)

It is a difficulty for candidates at the moment, in that panels are opting to use different applications formats. While we, as a panel, might think that we are being helpful in asking for a 1000 word application in reducing the time needed to write applications, this is only helpful if the same format is adopted by other panels that are in place at around the same time. (Series C, 2003)

In the last year, I have applied for three jobs and the length of the application has been different in each of them. This takes up a lot of time. I don't like that. I think it's too frustrating because I don't have a lot of time to write the applications. I can't do it at school, and at night I don't have time because I do my school paperwork that I didn't get to during the day. For one standardized format, you can then change little bits rather than having to write a completely new application and that's much easier for me. (Series C, 2003)

Though the specific issue of word limits has no echoes in other research, this element of it, its time consuming nature, is similar to the findings of other researchers including Barty and Sachs (2004), the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services ACT (2003), Gourley, Taylor and Doe (2001), Hughes (2004), and Lacey (2002a, 2000b, 2000c, 2004).

The flexibility of formats for applications, including a variety of lengths, whilst being seen as problematic by some research participants, as shown above, was seen in a positive light by some others.

I think that panels having the flexibility to ask for various lengths of applications is a good idea. It might stop people putting in blanket applications. I think that has happened in the past where people have used the same application for a number of positions and have just changed the name of the school. Whereas now, it forces people, if they are serious about applying for a position, to find out about the school. They need to write an application for that position. (Series E, 2004)

The old system of application turned into an exercise in recipe writing, with panels looking for applicants to mention the right documents or whatever. This way now is much more flexible and there are a lot more opportunities for applicants to be themselves. On this panel for instance, they were asked to write a personal statement.

That produced applications that were really quite different. (Series C, 2003)

I like the flexibility that we now have in terms of applications. We have moved from a 3000-word application requirement to a process where panels can ask for the word limit they would like. We now also have a system where the written application can be in a range of formats. I believe that this has allowed panels to get a real feel for the applicants as real people and how they would operate in the job they are applying for. (Series E, 2004)

I think that we are going through a settling-in period at the moment – where everything has been thrown up in the air. It might very quickly settle down into 'the new application format' that is seen as being the one that is successful in getting people to interview. That would be problematic because what we would then find is that it is again difficult to sort people out on the basis of application. If there is a standard format, it is much more difficult to determine who should be interviewed. (Series C, 2003)

4.1.1.2 Whose work is it?

The issue of applications potentially being able to be written by someone other than the person who was applying for the job was cause for considerable concern for a significant number of participants, both in terms of how ineffective this made the process (the comments which relate to this appear here) and of how unfair it was (see section 4.2.1.1).

I think the whole application process is stupid and ridiculous. I know lots of people who don't write their own applications – who have never written their own applications. I know someone who won a principalship recently who didn't write his or her application. They had only read it once before they even went to the interview. So, what is the point of that? (Series C, 2003)

The panel doesn't know whose work it is that you are judging. All people have to do is to go to someone who is an expert at writing, and get them to write their applications. I've actually done that for other people. They have come and talked to me, like you and I are talking now, and then I've gone away and crafted their application. I can't see how that is an effective way of comparing people. (Series C, 2003)

I know of times when one person has written an application for someone else. For me this raises the question of whose application is it that is being judged as part of the process. (Series B, 2003)

The issue discussed here, that of ownership of the work presented, whether in written form through applications, or in oral form through interviews, relates to validity, the capacity of a process to measure what it purports to; in this case, the work of the applicant. This links to findings by other researchers, such as Blackmore and Barty (2004), and Green (2002), and when they express concerns over the validity of the process.

4.1.1.3 The issue of consistency

The issue of consistency is one that arose in a number of different ways, including in applications, use of referee reports, and site visits. Participants in the research perceived the lack of consistency in measuring applications as another reason why they believed them to be ineffective.

The consistency of judgement around applications, or lack of it, is an issue. You can go for one job and get an interview, then go for another job and write virtually the same thing and not get one. You don't know what they want. There's no clear indication of what they are after. (Series C, 2003)

How can it work when different people read a set of applications and pick different people to be shortlisted? So the system

obviously isn't distinguishing between good candidates. If different panels can pick different people purely on applications, how can the application be a successful selection tool? To my scientific mind, that doesn't add up. (Series C, 2003)

Recently I applied for a Level 6 position within this district and, based on my application, got an interview. I know that there were other principals with greater experience than me who applied from other districts who didn't get an interview. When I applied for a Level 4 position in another district, I didn't get an interview. My application for that Level 4 position was much the same, yet no interview. How does that work? There is no consistency. It just makes people more unsettled and disgruntled. It left me wondering if I'm writing a good application or not, if I'm perceived well or not. What comes out of it is that you say to yourself, 'that superintendent doesn't like me' so I won't apply for a job in their district again. It becomes very personal. (Series C, 2003)

This particular issue of concern has also been identified by other researchers such as Blackmore and Barty (2004), Hawkins (1991), Lacey and Gronn (2005a, 2005b), Wendel and Breed (1988), and White and White (1998).

4.1.1.4 Skills needed by principals

The skills needed by principals is another example of an issue being perceived both positively and negatively by research participants.

A number of participants held the view that, in assessing applications, panels were assessing only one skill, and that principals needed to have proficiency in a broader range of skills that could not be measured through applications.

I think that the application is only part of it. I think that people selecting for positions – at any promoted level – need to go to their

workplaces and see the applicants. Because, otherwise, you can get someone who writes absolutely brilliantly, but really doesn't perform well. So you need to talk to people they work with. (Series C, 2003)

The whole system lacks credibility in my mind. Judgements [on promotion success] have been made on things that shouldn't have been judged – on people's ability to write and speak well, not on their ability to be a principal. (Series B, 2003)

There are people who can't write effectively who are proven performers as leaders, who perhaps shouldn't be disadvantaged because they are not good writers. (Series E, 2004)

This echoes the findings of other researchers such as Blackmore and Barty (2004), Gilliland (1994, 1995), and Rynes and Connerley (1993).

This situation is contrasted by the views expressed below. For some interviewees, the ability to be articulate in a written format was seen as being an important skill needed by principals in their work. They believed that applications were a way to be able to demonstrate their ability in this area.

The principal's job involves a lot of writing, so I don't have a problem with the fact that a major part of our selection process involves that skill. I think you need to be able to demonstrate that you can write clearly and articulate both a vision you might have for the position you are applying for, and that you can very clearly demonstrate your skills, experience and expertise. I think you have to show that you have these skills to be a principal. (Series E, 2004)

A principal of a school ought to be able to write and articulate their vision to their community. The application is a way of applicants demonstrating that. (Series E, 2004)

I think you have to be able to write well if you are going to do the job. By virtue of the principal's position, you have to have a high degree of literacy, and applications are a way of measuring that. (Series C, 2003)

This finding is in line with the conclusions of researchers such as Gilliland (1994, 1995), and Rynes and Connerley (1993), who found that applicants prized selection methodologies that had a high correlation to the job being applied for. This is a disparate view to the one above, where some interviewees had concerns that applications measured only this skill and were therefore problematic in their view.

4.1.1.5 The use of curriculum vitae (CVs)

As with the issue of word limits, the use of CVs is another example of a particularly Tasmanian contextualised concern, and one that has not been raised in other research. This is one of many examples where the same issue was seen in both negative and positive terms by participants.

For the following interviewee, it was seen as ineffective.

The only thing that I don't like about CVs is when a 2-page one is asked for. I really think that it leaves you thinking, 'what do they want to know'? I don't think that that's entirely helpful. For instance, when I applied for this last position, it asked for a 2-page CV and I thought, 'do they want to know about my teaching history?' because that is obviously important to people because they like to see the breadth of that person's experience. So I set about doing that and by the time I had finished, I had used up one page of my two pages! I felt really uncomfortable about that, because I knew I had a lot of other things I wanted to include. So I tried to squash that up a bit, and then I tried to write about significant leadership roles to give them a view of my leadership experience, and significant professional learning to show that I was an ongoing

learner. So, I never like the 2-page CV because I never know what to put in and what to leave out. I think that it would be better, if you are going to stipulate that the CV is two pages, to state that the CV must include these two or three things, so people have some guidelines. (Series E, 2004)

For the following participants, the issue was their belief that CVs were not actually used by panels as part of their deliberations, despite their being submitted by applicants.

On the issue of CVs, I'm going to be very honest here and say that on the last two panels I was on, the CVs of some people weren't even read. One person sent in a CD-Rom with their CV on it. The Chair of the panel asked panel members did they look at it and people said no. So it wasn't even looked at, at all. (Series C, 2003)

What I tended to do was stick everything I couldn't fit in the application into the CV. You know, people obviously read my application because there were questions about things in the application during the interview. But nobody referred to anything in the CV, so maybe it was read, maybe it wasn't – but I don't think so. (Series D, 2004)

The following research participants offer a counter view, that the use of CVs makes the selection process more effective.

As a panel member, I think CVs are very useful as a checking mechanism. In one instance, an applicant wrote in their CV about a significant change that they had implemented in a particular school, but in checking their CV, they had only been in that school for two months. On another recent panel I was on, two applicants were very close – both were highly experienced and skilled and capable of doing the job very well. The panel was able to use their CVs to really investigate how long they had been in various schools and in what capacities, to help to differentiate between them. We also used their CV to check on

their professional learning. In these cases, using applicants' CVs was very helpful. (Series E, 2004)

This application was 1000 words and an unrestricted CV. I thought that was good. I used the CV to address the criteria and the 1000 words to address my philosophy. I think that's a much better way to go. (Series D, 2004)

I think that the extended CV is very useful in terms of being able to capture in a really succinct way a person's qualifications, experience, skills, where they are at in terms of their engagement in professional learning etc. and how they can relate to the position they are applying for. In using this extended CV format, you can really reduce the size of the application and have it focus in on their projection into the role. I find that the shorter application length really focuses people's thinking and requires them to really articulate their position in relation to the current context. (Series E, 2004)

In the way that CVs are talked about above (a summation of skills, experiences, etc.), they are similar to what Clark (1989) refers to as application forms, which he sees as being advantageous for checking on the biographical data provided by applicants.

4.1.1.6 What is being judged?

Of concern to some research participants was the potential for judgements about the worth of an application being made on its style, rather than on the information contained within it.

I'm a little cynical about the essay-writing bit — the application — because some people deem that a particular style of writing is better than others. Therefore people who write in that style will do better in the selection process. (Series D, 2004)

Application writing is a skill, and as such it can be developed, and can be passed on

from one person to another. So the style of application becomes homogenized. (Series B, 2003)

As a sub-set of this concern, the following comment echoes the findings by researchers such as Gronn and Lacey (2005b) and Blackmore and Barty (2004) who found concerns that the process advantaged known applicants and/or those who fitted a pre-conceived, but largely unarticulated, idea of what the good applicants would be like, over unknown ones and/or ones who did not fit a pre-conceived mould.

What panel members are doing is selecting themselves. Whoever's application looks exactly like one they would write, then they will accept that person as being the best person for the job. (Series B, 2003)

A further sub-set of this concern, expressed by some research participants, was the view that applications were ineffective because what was written may not be indicative of the people writing them. Instead of being themselves, applicants may be attempting to portray themselves as fitting what they consider to be the view held by the panel of a 'good' principal/applicant, so panel members may not be seeing the real person behind the writing.

Having the application as such a crucial plank of the old process was not good. People ended up writing up what they thought people on the panel wanted to hear. Therefore, the panel had no real way of validating whether what applicants were saying was what they truly believed. (Series A, 2003)

Applications have become too standardised. You [panel members] don't have any experience of applicants as individuals in their writing. You don't see the real applicant. You only see some sort of generic description of what they think the perfect principal may look like. (Series C, 2003)

4.1.1.7 An opportunity for professional learning

For the following research participants, applications were seen as being a valuable professional learning experience.

Participating in an application-writing process can be a very effective professional learning exercise in the sense that it requires people to reflect on what they truly believe about education. (Series E, 2004)

I think it's great that panels are able to ask for different formats of applications. For me personally, I was forced to start with a clean sheet of paper and really think about what I wanted to say, rather than reconfiguring an existing document, as I have done sometimes in the past. It was a fantastic professional learning process for me because it made me create time to reflect on the reading that I had done and my own practice, and to be really clear about those in terms of the job I was applying for. (Series D, 2004)

As with the findings of much of this research, participants could see both good and bad in the application component of the process. The following two quotes exemplify this.

On the side of 'applications-are-bad':

I can't see any purpose for applications. Does Ricky Ponting apply to be captain of the Australian Cricket Team via an application? No. There is some other process in place that grooms him to be captain, and there is an in-depth knowledge of his work by the people who will be making the selection. (Series D, 2004)

Contrasting with the viewpoint of 'applications-are-not-all-bad':

I can't see of any other way, other than application, in which panels can shortlist. The thing is, how do they narrow down a field if not by application? They have to use applications. (Series D, 2004)

4.1.1.8 Overview of the effectiveness/application dimension

Table 11 overviews the findings of this section of the research, and shows that, in general, applications were perceived more negatively than positively in terms of their effectiveness.

Table 11: Overview of effectiveness/application comments

Negative aspects	Positive aspects
Word limits: - imposition - low - variable	Flexibility of formats
Whose work is it	Skills needed by principals
The issue of consistency	Low word limits
Skills needed by principals	The use of CVs
The use of CVs	An opportunity for professional learning
What is being judged: - non-relevant judgements - not seeing the real person - advantages of the 'known'	

4.1.2 The effectiveness/interview dimension

On the theme of effectiveness, it was the interview component of the process that attracted the most comment. As with applications, while participants had

very divergent views on the effectiveness of interviews, the majority of comments were about their lack of effectiveness.

As with the effectiveness/application dimension, a number of sub-themes emerged: the effect on performance; the skills needed by principals; relationship to real life; non-relevant judgements; level of difficulty; whose work is it; issues of consistency; informal approach; and the weighting given to interviews.

4.1.2.1 The effect on performance

The issue of most concern in terms of effectiveness and the interview was the effect that interviews have on an applicant's performance. All comments made in relation to this issue were negative and were expressions of the view that interviews inhibited good performance. For most participants who commented, the problems of stress and nerves were significant inhibitors to them feeling that an interview is effective in terms of selection.

In many instances, I don't think that an interview situation gets the best out of applicants. I know that fear and nervousness inhibits my performance, so it probably does for others as well. That raises the question of what we are measuring. Are we judging people's ability at interview or their leadership? (Series B, 2003)

I don't think that an interview gives applicants the chance to show their best. The situation is high pressured and very stressful. It inhibits quick thinking and that is not a true reflection of reality for a lot of people. Many people are quick thinkers in their school settings, but can't do the same thing in an interview because they are too stressed. So interviews are not the best way of getting a sense of how the person actually works in practice. (Series A, 2003)

An interview situation doesn't allow a panel to see the real me. At my last interview,

they didn't get even remotely close. I didn't even see me! I saw an idiot blabbering on and wondering who he was. It was like an out-of-body experience. I could see myself doing and saying things and saying to myself, 'don't say that, you don't talk like that', but it didn't make any difference. (Series A, 2003)

Interviews are like an exam. I find it really difficult to think under the pressure of an interview. It's more like a memory test. And I often find that I revert, which I did this time horrifically, to trying to remember theory-book answers instead of talking about the way I know that I do my job, instead of being myself and telling people how I see the world. As soon as you start to do that in a pressure situation, you lose everything. (Series B, 2003)

I know that panels are saying that they are trying to be more informal, more relaxed, but it's the person who is interviewed who has to feel that way. If you are the person being interviewed and you are nervous by nature, it wouldn't matter whether you are being whipped with a ruler or a feather, you will still feel whipped. So it is still a gruelling process, no matter how it is happening. (Series D, 2004)

Researchers such as Hughes (2004), Lacey (2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2004), and Lacey and Gronn (2005a, 2005b) revealed similar findings in their research, reporting that the process, of which the interview is a component, was considered to be traumatic.

Some participants expressed concern that elements of the interview situation over which they had no (or little) control, such as the physical set-up of the interview room, could impact negatively on their performance.

I think that, when panels set up interviews, they need to think about the set-up of the room. We were in a little room with a small table and there was myself and four other people at the table. It was very difficult for me to have eye contact with people. I didn't

feel as though I could communicate with the panel. I should have had enough courage to say something, to take my seat and move it back – and be more assertive in that way. So the physical set-up of the room was a bit funny, and it threw me a bit. That's the second time that that's happened to me. The other one was like a gauntlet. It was at a long table. There were three people up one side and three people up the other – and me at the end. It wasn't nice at all. However, some people manage to perform well, obviously, in that environment. So they're things that maybe I need to deal with. (Series C, 2003)

I found the physical set-up of the room in the interview I did most recently to be difficult. It was in ... and I had expected it to be at the big table [in that room]. So I'd prepared notes and materials that I could actually spread around myself. When I went in there and saw the panel around the small table and saw that that [my expectation] wasn't going to happen, that threw me. I did mention it and they offered to go to the bigger table, but I just said no. But it threw me. I went into 'text-book mode' instead of 'me mode' and then I couldn't access all the notes I needed to do that well, so the whole thing just fell apart. (Series B, 2003)

For the following participant, the interview process was inhibitive of their performance for a slightly different reason — it did not facilitate a selection panel seeing the 'real' applicant, but rather the 'type' that the applicant believed the panel preferred.

When panels, design questions they are obviously looking for particular stuff when a candidate replies. It therefore becomes a guessing game about what they are looking for. I wonder does that encourage the 'true' person to come through, or does the panel get what the person thinks they want to hear? It's always a problem for me — do I actually be myself and let 'Mr X' come out, or do I show the person that I think the panel want to see? If it is not myself that I am showing to the panel, how

valid is their judgement on what they see?
(Series A, 2003)

Green's (2002) research uncovered similar concerns.

4.1.2.2 Skills needed by principals

The concern expressed here in relation to interviews echoes a similar one articulated by some research participants in relation to applications – that eloquence (either in written form for applications, or in verbal form in interviews) may be persuasive in the selection process, but it is not the only skill needed by principals, and thus may not be an effective indicator of on-the-job performance. All comments made in relation to this issue indicated negative perceptions.

When you look at what it is we're looking for in a principal and how we would best find that, this process doesn't do that, because at the moment the interview is an intellectual pursuit. If my intellect can think fast enough under pressure, I'll be able to come out with six or seven salient points about leadership, management, equity or whatever, then I can shoot them out to you and I look like I really know what I'm talking about. Despite how I sound at interview, that might not happen in the place where I lead. So how accurate is it to base a decision on that? (Series B, 2003)

I believe that performance at interview does not equate to performance on the job. In fact, I believe that there would almost be an inverse relationship between the two, because good leaders are not people who spruik all the time – and that's what the interview measures – your ability to get in there and talk. (Series D, 2004)

I don't think an interview gives you a really clear picture of how well a person is going to do in the job. It certainly says they can do well under that circumstance, but I don't think it accurately predicts their success in

the principalship. I think we've all known people who can do that – perform well at interview – but who as practitioners are less effective than what they appeared to be at interview. (Series D, 2004)

The role of a principal is much more than just knowing policies. It's about team playing, leading a community, working with kids. This process does not accurately assess that. You don't have a hope of gauging that in a forty-minute interview. (Series B, 2003)

I have had the experience of being on an interview panel, which awarded a promotion position to a person who was highly articulate at interview. This candidate was a standout at the interview, so you couldn't not award them the position on the basis of that interview. Being articulate was something they were, and continue to be, particularly good at, but their performance on the job did not match what they had said. They were awful, but their interview performance gave us no indication of that. (Series A, 2003)

These concerns are in line with findings by Blackmore and Barty (2004).

4.1.2.3 Relationship to real life

Relationship to real life is another example of an issue that was perceived both negatively and positively by research participants. Some interviewees held the view that interviewees did not mirror real life. Participants who commented on this issue shared similar concerns to those expressed above – that ability in one part of the process (in this case, being able to respond quickly to interview questions), was seen as a measure of success, when in the real world of the principalship, this would not happen often.

I'm not a person who makes decisions on the run, and often the questions I've been asked in interviews are controversial. They say they're not, but often they are. If I say

things like, 'I'd take an issue like that on advisement' and not give a response, often I don't get good feedback from panels – they perceive that as you not knowing about the issue. Whereas if someone came in here and asked me a difficult question about an issue, I don't say, 'here's how you do it'. I'd get back to them later. (Series D, 2004)

There are very few times in your actual work, when you need to perform in the same way as in an interview, and therefore, although I can't think of an alternative, I don't like that part of the process. If you talk well and you think quickly on your feet, that can be quite useful. In the principalship though, there are very few times that you don't have the time to say, 'let me think about that and get back to you'. (Series A, 2003)

On a day-to-day basis I'm not a nervous person, but in an interview situation you feel that you are being judged on the words that you use. That doesn't replicate in any other area of your working life, so that's not useful. It's just your capacity to deal with high stress levels. The job is stressful, I'm not denying that, but the level is not comparable to that intensity for that period of time. (Series C, 2003)

For some research participants however, interviews were effective because they were perceived to mirror real life. This situation is in direct contrast to the views expressed above.

Being a principal is an incredibly hard, challenging, and wonderful job. You are responsible for student achievement, for working with the school community etc. Therefore, if you really can't sit through a rigorous interview, then are you the best person for the job? To be perfectly honest, as a new principal in a school, you will come up against tasks that are a lot tougher than an interview, so you have to be able to cope. (Series E, 2004)

People will be nervous in an interview. However, the ability to manage nerves and focus on the task at hand is consistent with the principal's role. If the principal is given something to do which causes nervous tension, a critical incident for example, they have to be able to be calm and effective and develop an appropriate course of action. I think that seeing how people perform under pressure is useful. Other people might disagree, but seeing how people cope under the level of pressure that an interview situation creates, provides useful insights. (Series E, 2004)

If you are applying for a principalship position, and you can't talk about your work and you can't face an interview panel, without letting nerves bring you undone, then that is probably something you have to work on. For principalships, we have to think that applicants for that level of job should be able to control their nerves. (Series E, 2004)

The role of a principal, more than anything else is about communicating, and if you can't do that in an interview situation, then when can you? This ability to communicate with a range of people, sometimes under stress, is a key skill of being a principal. As principal, you have to be able to communicate in a range of situations in the dynamic environment that a school is – when an angry parent confronts you, when staff don't agree with a decision you have made, when there is an issue in the playground – so you should be able to deal with an interview. (Series E, 2004)

4.1.2.4 Non-relevant judgements

For a number of research participants, it was a concern that there was a perceived lack of clarity over what the interview was measuring. This issue is similar to one expressed in the 'Applications/effectiveness dimension' section,

the view that the 'how' of something (in that case, applications; in this case, interviews) was being given more credence than the 'what'.

Panels need to have a good understanding of the behavioural characteristics of people, and what effects these can have on the way they come across at interview. Their responses shouldn't be judged on, let's say, their behavioural deficiencies. An example of this is eye contact. Someone may not make eye contact because they are thinking deeply, and this should not be seen as an indication of not being able to get on with people. (Series A, 2003)

The process in the past has rewarded interview performance and, how can I say it, presentation. By that I mean how people look. I know of people who haven't got jobs because they are overweight or untidy, but who I know in their school are first-class operators. They have lost out to someone who is attractive, well-groomed, friendly and can speak well at interview. (Series D, 2004)

Some people are advantaged by the interview process because they have a similar mind and a similar persuasion to issues as the panel. That means that panel members are more likely to be impressed by these people. (Series D, 2004)

Research by Wendel and Breed (1988) revealed similar concerns to the ones expressed here.

A sub-set of this issue of non-relevant judgements can be found in a topic that was highly contextualised – a pre-prepared presentation. This was an element of the Tasmanian principal selection process that consisted of providing an applicant with a question or an issue some considerable time (such as a week) prior to the interview. Applicants would then address this question or issue first, before being asked questions that needed a more immediate response. This approach, which was popular with selection panels at one time, drew considerable comment from research participants, all of it negative.

Because of the contextualised nature of this issue, it has not been articulated in the findings of other researchers.

When pre-prepared presentations first came in, I thought they were a good idea. Now, however, I don't. They were certainly interesting – people got the chance to do all sorts of whiz-bang things and try and dazzle the panel, but I don't think they added any further knowledge of the applicant for the panel. All they did was show the panel that the applicant could use the technology, but they didn't provide a discriminating tool at all. (Series E, 2004)

I don't like the pre-prepared presentation idea, because I think that it's just another application basically, only it's verbal. And, I know from feedback that I've got from one panel that they were blown away by the PowerPoint presentation of another applicant. So the bar had been raised and to deliver a verbal thing, as I did, you weren't in the race. It made me wonder what exactly they were judging. (Series C, 2003)

Presentations were popular for a while, but I'm not sure that they were all that useful really. I think that they ended up being 'bigger than Ben Hur', and not necessarily telling the panel much about the person. I think they measured how well someone could use PowerPoint and talk about themselves in that format, but I'm not sure that they really got at the heart of someone's understandings. (Series E, 2004)

4.1.2.5 Level of difficulty

An issue for a number of research participants was that of the perceived difficulty or ease of the interview. An element of this issue, ascertaining true understanding, was another of those that was perceived both negatively and positively.

Some participants expressed the view that interviews are not hard enough. Interestingly, this issue would appear to contradict the results indicating that stress impacted negatively on interview performance.

Personally I wouldn't mind going into an interview and not knowing the questions in advance – just having a conversation with the panel. Just being asked questions off the cuff would really test who knows their stuff and who doesn't. (Series E, 2004)

I don't think the interview part of the process is anywhere tough enough. I know lots of people get really, really nervous in interviews, but I don't mean that kind of tough. What I don't think is tough enough, is that we don't interrogate enough. It needs to be tougher. If you are asking someone to run a school community, whether it is 200 students or 800 students, there should be some rigour to the process. Being principal of a school is a big job and the panel needs to know a lot about applicants, so that they know whether they are right for the job. There should be lots of questions, and it should be a real interrogation to find out what the person really thinks and believes. If an applicant can't cope with that, then they can't do the job. (Series E, 2004)

I'm not sure that we really have it right in terms of the depth of the questions. I think that people can almost get practiced at interviews. You can almost predict what will be in the interview and then plan for it. For instance, most people would predict that there would be a question about the Essential Learnings and they would prepare for that. Improving student outcomes is absolutely critical for leaders and so panels need to do what they need to, in order to find out how candidates are going to impact on that. We should be beyond having generic questions about team-building, the Essential Learnings or whatever. People can read anything and regurgitate it at interview and still not tell you about

themselves. It can't be just about 'talking the talk'. (Series E, 2004)

The questions in an interview should be about the role of the principal and how the candidate is going to do that in that particular school. They need to be difficult so that the applicant really has to think. There is a lot of information and jargon out there, and a panel needs to know that an applicant really does understand what they are talking about. (Series E, 2004)

Some research participants were more specific in their focus within this issue, commenting on the interview as a means of exploration of a candidate's deep understandings.

Some perceived this negatively:

We need to get beyond what people can talk about in an interview and find out what someone can do on the job – in an independent, pro-active way. We also need to really find out what people really believe and that doesn't come out in interviews. In interviews, you can have a view of what you think people want to hear and can just say it. (Series A, 2003)

Being good at an interview is definitely not enough to gauge whether a person will be a successful principal. You have to find out how they apply their knowledge. (Series A, 2004)

I think that interviews generally, and certainly presentations, are nonsense. It is too easy for people to prepare a load of stuff that they think is what they should be saying. What we need to do is get to people's real knowledge and understanding. (Series A, 2003)

In contrast, many people felt that the interview enabled the panel to gauge a person's real understanding, much more so than an application was able to.

The interview is important in getting to the heart of people's knowledge. It allows you to really find out what people know. Supplementary questions help with this because it is easy to see then when people don't have a true understanding — they will often refer to their pre-prepared notes to tell the panel what they think they want to hear. (Series A, 2003)

Personally I like interviews as a method of selection. If we look at theories of learning, one of the key planks is a demonstration of learning, and I believe that interviews allow that to occur. If someone really understands their stuff, then that comes through clearly at an interview. One would assume that people applying for principalship positions are highly experienced, highly skilled educators, and as such, they should be able to answer any question that is put to them. (Series E, 2004)

In an interview, you have to know your stuff, especially when supplementary questions are asked. This is like the role of a principal where you are asked questions from left-field and you have to have the answers — you can't rehearse them. (Series E, 2004)

4.1.2.6 Whose work is it?

It was found that there was a perception of a potential for uncertainty over whose work was represented in an application. This potential for uncertainty was also found to be a concern for some research participants over whose work an interview actually was, and thus whose work was actually being assessed.

Can you be sure whose work the interview is anyway? I know of a situation where someone was helped with their prepared question that the panel had set, by someone who was on the panel. (Series B, 2003)

I don't like the use of a pre-prepared question. By its very nature, it allows people to prepare in advance, and who knows how they will do that? What you may end up seeing may well have been a group presentation, and thus, not an accurate insight into someone's true capacity. (Series A, 2003)

Interestingly, in contrast to the views expressed above, for some research participants, interviews were a way of gauging the actuality of the person being interviewed.

I think that interviews are an important part of the process. I've heard stories of people getting other people to write their applications and CVs, so that becomes a case of whose work is it that the panel is judging anyway? If you didn't have an interview, Jack Citizen could be chosen on an application and a CV that is not his work. How fair is that? And really, how effective is it? (Series E, 2004)

The less formal interviews are a good discriminator. People have to be able to talk about their own knowledge, beliefs etc. in an interview situation. (Series A, 2003)

4.1.2.7 Issues of consistency

The issue of consistency in the measurement of performance at interview was one that attracted only negative comment. It was also an area of concern expressed by some participants in relation to applications and the process as a whole.

I don't like the interview process at all. I've been on the losing side and the winning side of interviews and I know for a fact that I haven't done anything different at the interview. I've said the same things, I've presented in the same way, to the same people. When you get your feedback, they just say things like 'you didn't come across as if you knew a lot about that particular

issue' – even though I know I've said the same things, done the same things, used the same notes as I have before. So, it's not a good process. (Series D, 2004)

This issue of lack of consistency has also been identified as an area of concern in the findings of other researchers, such as Blackmore and Barty (2004) and Lacey and Gronn (2005a, 2005b).

4.1.2.8 The use of a more informal approach

A significant amount of the 'positivity' surrounding interviews related to the more informal approach being adopted by many panels in recent times, as compared to the more formalised approach that characterised interviews in the past.

I think that the more conversational style of interview that panels are using now is advantageous. It encourages applicants to relax, and the more people feel relaxed, the more panels can find out about them. It also enables applicants' responses to be explored more fully, so that again, more information is provided to a panel to allow them to make a better decision. (Series E, 2004)

I like the more informal, conversational style of interviews that are being used now. I think that that style takes the pressure off the applicant. If they are in a conversation and it is more informal, then they are more likely to provide deeper responses and show more of themselves if they are not nervous. (Series C, 2003)

The interview was more of a discussion than a formal interview. We (the panel) had planned it that way. We had prepared some supplementary questions, and that helped to make it more informal. For instance, if a candidate said something we wanted to explore further, we could do that. Because of this, I think that the candidates would

have been comfortable. I don't know what else you could do to make someone more comfortable. (Series A, 2003)

4.1.2.9 The 'weighting' given to interviews

Although the interview is only a part of the whole selection process, many research participants indicated that they believed that it was a heavily weighted part in terms of how it influenced the selection decision made by the panel. The negative perceptions expressed above about a range of issues related to interviews would seem to compound this as an area of concern.

I really hate the idea that I could be the best candidate for the job and I could actually muck that up at interview. I actually think I am a good candidate, that I could do this job really well. The thought that a 40 to 60 minute interview could mean that I don't get the job is an untenable one for me. (Series B, 2003)

I think that, regardless of whatever anybody says, the interview is crucial. If you don't get the interview, you don't get the job. So, you are judged on your interview performance. I don't know how much credence is given to – you know, if you know something but you can't articulate it. So, do they think that if you can't articulate it, then you can't do it? I don't know if that's true or not. (Series D, 2003)

The interview is still the most important part of the process in terms of who gets the job. It is over-weighted because I think it's the face-to-face thing that counts for most people. You tend not to believe what other people tell you anyway. You tend to want to make your own judgements. I think that's human nature. So you can listen to someone say that this person is the greatest thing since sliced bread, but if they don't look like sliced bread to you, you won't give them the job. (Series A, 2003)

How often does it happen that someone who is a fantastic operator, but mucks up the interview, actually gets the job? Hardly ever! Every time I've been on a panel, and someone has mucked up the interview, they haven't won. (Series D, 2004)

This view that the interview is over-weighted in the selection process is consistent with the findings of Hughes (2004).

4.1.2.10 Overview of the effectiveness/interview dimension

Table 12 overviews the findings of this section of the research, and shows that, in general, interviews were perceived much more negatively than positively in terms of their effectiveness.

Table 12: Overview of effectiveness/interview comments

Negative aspects	Positive aspects
The effect on performance	Relationship to real life
Skills needed by principals	The level of difficulty
Relationship to real life	Whose work is it
Non-relevant judgements	Informal approach
The level of difficulty	
Whose work is it	
Lack of consistency	
The 'weighting'	

4.1.3 The effectiveness/verification dimension

Verification has a number of dimensions. Most traditionally, verification is undertaken through the use of referee reports. In Tasmania, applications for

principalship positions, or indeed any promotable positions, are accompanied by a Cover Sheet (see Appendix A) known as Application for Employment, that provides space for an applicant to nominate two referees, from whom the panel is able to seek views of that applicant.

An adjunct to this form of verification is what is known in the Tasmanian context as 'verification of claims'. This is a relatively new aspect to the selection process. Since the Principal Selection Project (in Gourley et al. 2000), which identified referee reports as an area of concern, it has been accepted that panel members are able to go outside of the two referees named by the applicant to talk to anyone about the applicant's work. At one stage, in fact, a version of the application form (see Appendix E), developed by a group of people who were working as Assistants to the Superintendents, actively encouraged applicants to name people who could verify specific tasks, activities and projects that they had been involved in. It is interesting to note that this process, and site visits, are two of only three areas of any part of this research (the other being the fairness/interview dimension) in which research participants' positive comments equalled or outweighed the negative. A form of verification that can be used by selection panels is the site visit. It is possible for panels to arrange to visit the workplace of applicants to 'see them in action' and to talk to a range of people who work with them.

This section examines the perceptions of research participants in relation to the effectiveness of all three aspects of verification – referee reports, verification of claims, and site visits. A number of sub-themes emerged: veracity of information; power of the superintendent; issues of consistency; and the provision of additional information.

4.1.3.1 Veracity of information

Of interest to a significant number of research participants who commented on verification elements of the selection process were issues related to the veracity of information provided. This interest took a number of guises:

honesty of information; difficulty in comparison of referee reports in particular; and, how much a referee really knows an applicant's work.

Some participants indicated that, for a variety of reasons, referees were likely to be guarded in what they said in their references, thus questioning their effectiveness in providing information about a candidate's performance.

The written referee report format was constraining for some people. If, as a panel member, you have to 'read between the lines' of a referee report, that is really difficult. If you have to second-guess what the referee is trying to tell you, and all you have to go on is what is written on a piece of paper in front of you, it's problematic. (Series D, 2004)

There is a tension between a referee being careful about what they are saying because a candidate can access their referee reports, and them being honest. If people are choosing not to provide information because of that, then how useful are the referee reports really? I think it is fair that people should be able to see their referee reports, but it does make it difficult. (Series D, 2004)

The use of referee reports became meaningless. People had to work with the people they were writing referee reports for later on, and people were too gutless to really write the truth. People used all this flowery language, so, in the end, there became no way of comparing people. (Series A, 2003)

For the following research participant, the honesty of information provided by the verification process could potentially be affected by the nature of the relationship between the applicant and their verifier.

There are dangers in verification that I think we need to be aware of. For example, you mightn't get on terribly well with someone, or you might want to unload someone onto someone else, so it can be an issue about how much weighting is given to what

particular people say and the context in which it is said. (Series C, 2003)

In contrast, some research participants expressed the view that verification of claims encouraged honesty, not of verifiers as has been explored above, but of applicants, in encouraging them to be more honest about their work and their achievements.

I think the verification process is a good thing. From an applicant's point of view, it means that you think carefully about what you put down in your application and from the panel's point of view, I think it reduces claims that people make – like being clear that they were part of a process rather than led the process. So that leads to more honesty. I'm not saying that people were dishonest in the past. But it did leave itself open to a person's role in a particular situation and some of the evidences that they gave. It didn't have a sharp enough edge to it, so some people could overstate their role. Verification stops that. (Series D, 2004)

There was a period a while ago when I think referee reports were worthless, but now with this verification process that we have, it makes the referee reports far more effective. In the past, referee reports were worthless because everyone was excellent at this and excellent at that. But now, combined with the verification process, which makes people be honest in what they are saying, I see it as much more effective. (Series D, 2004)

There has, in the past, been the potential for unsubstantiated claims to be made and for these to have more weight than they should have had if there was closer scrutiny. The capacity for a panel to seek verification on claims made reduces that. (Series A, 2003)

For the following research participant, it was the pressure inherent in the use of telephone referee reports that was of concern.

I don't believe that the use of telephone referees is a good thing. You are relying on people's ability to put words together very fast and make a judgement on someone's career. (Series B, 2003)

By way of contrast to this view, some research participants opined that honesty was enhanced by the utilisation of viewed telephone referee reports.

The use of phone referee reports is advantageous. If we want people to talk honestly about their knowledge of the applicant, too much preparation can be a disadvantage, and can allow people to choose their words carefully and to think about weighting of words. A verbal conversation allows you to respond really honestly. (Series A, 2003)

I think that telephone referee reports are much better. The whole thing being verbal allows for honesty. Previously, you sighted your referee report, and, in many cases, sat down and wrote it with your referee. Because of this, it really said nothing. It wasn't an honest version of you as a leader, or an operator. I think people were frightened to actually write honest referee reports. (Series C, 2003)

I like phone referee reports because referees don't have a lot of time to think about their responses, so they are more likely to be honest. (Series A, 2003)

Similarly, the following comments indicate approval for the use of telephone referee reports because they minimise ambiguity.

I like the use of phone referee reports. Because it is an interactive conversation, clarification can be sought where there is uncertainty. This avoids ambiguity and increases the breadth of information that is provided. (Series B, 2003)

They are also more likely to be clearer, and the person seeking the referee report can ask questions to ensure understanding. This means that it is less likely to be up to

the panel to interpret the information given.
(Series A, 2003)

Others were supportive because telephone referee reports facilitate the collection of more targeted information.

When we seek referee reports now, we do so by phone and we ask specific questions so we can add to our knowledge of applicants. We tend to ask fewer and fewer generic questions and are asking specific questions on each candidate based on what we have read in their application. That is much more powerful than having some sort of generic written statement that is largely useless. (Series D, 2004)

Telephone referee reports are much better than written ones. With written ones, I think that sometimes what wasn't said in a referee report became an important factor. In an instance where the referee didn't mention something that the applicant had made such a big thing of in their application, the panel was left to wonder why. It might just have been that the referee chose not to do that, or they just forgot to do that, or neglected to do that. It was all a case of second guessing. With a phone referee report, the questions can more directed at what the panel really want to find out to make the correct decision. I think that that's a really good thing. (Series D, 2004)

The point of referees or verification is that a panel is seeking some information about a person's current performance. It should be driven by asking for a judgement to be made on the applicant's current level of competence against the selection criteria. That's why I think that a telephone conversation with a referee is a much better way to go, because it can be a two-way conversation. It does need to be backed up by sending a transcript of the conversation to the referee for endorsement, but it is a much better system than using a written pro-forma. It allows the person asking the questions to be more probing. (Series E, 2004)

Of concern for some participants was the fact that referees may not really know their work; thus, again, bringing into question the veracity of the information that they were able to provide. This issue is linked to 'the power of the superintendent' (see below), since, under the selection process as it currently stands, there is an expectation that applicants for promotion positions will use their line manager as one of their referees. For principals, that person is the superintendent, (that is prior to 2005, with the equivalent position now known as Branch Manager).

Basically, neither of my referees has ever worked with me. This is a huge disadvantage in the principal's position. This is true, unless you're an aspiring principal, in which case you can use someone at your current school as a referee. But if you're already a principal, you're at a huge disadvantage, because very few people actually see your work. It's hard to use your colleagues at work, because they don't really understand the nature of the principalship and therefore can't really give an accurate assessment of your work. They can give a personal view – say he's a good principal because I like this, this and this, but they can't really give a view of what the principalship is really about. (Series B, 2003)

I don't have a problem with the district superintendent being a referee, but I don't think it's fair if that's the only referee that they contact. I think they need to contact people who actually work with you on a daily basis, who really know your work. On the last job I applied for, I was asked to nominate a community representative that the panel then spoke to, as well as my referee who works with me in my school. So I feel that this was a much more thorough process, than just asking the superintendent. Because those people both knew my work over a long period of time and had a very clear perception of how things had changed under my leadership. The parent was president of the P&F, had

children at the school and was a member of the local community and I felt that they were able to give a very clear picture of my work from a parent's point of view – as someone close to my work. Likewise with my other referee – my Assistant Principal – they knew what goes on in the school; they had been with me for a long period of time and so also knew what has changed in the school. But the superintendent, who we have to use as a referee because they are my line manager, doesn't. (Series C, 2003)

The superintendent doesn't really know how I perform here in my school. All he or she knows is that District Office don't get many telephone calls from parents complaining about the school. That's really all they know. I've been a principal in this District for five years now and during that time I've had three visits from the superintendent. So I don't know how they could possibly know how I am doing my job. (Series C, 2003)

There is an expectation that the district superintendent will be the referee because they are considered to be my line manager. And I don't believe that the district superintendent really knows what goes on in my school. They form a perception of what you are like by certain things that happen and certain dealings that they have with you. But the district superintendent hasn't been in my school for a long time and the only times that they have, is when there has been a crisis, such as a meeting with a particularly difficult parent who has approached the district superintendent to have a meeting. This is hardly a good basis to form a view of my work. My staff would not know what the district superintendent looks like... I don't have a problem with the district superintendent being a referee, but I don't think it's fair if that's the only referee that they contact. I think they need to contact people who actually work with you on a daily basis. (Series D, 2004)

Also of concern for a number of participants was their belief that, because of the way referee reports are written, they are difficult to compare.

The use of referees became meaningless. People used all this flowery language, so in the end, there became no way of comparing people. You were finding out more about the person who wrote the referee report than about the person they were supposed to be describing. (Series A, 2003)

It became very hard to read the language of written referee reports in a comparative way. One person's effusive report might be another's cautious one. (Series D, 2004)

The issue of the perception of a lack of honesty in referee reports is consistent with concerns expressed by researchers such as Falcone (1992), Castetter (1992), D'O'Brian (1993), Dunn (1995), Barada (1996), Hardy and Rowe (1999) and Isaacs (1999).

Site visits were seen by some research participants as being effective because of another element related to the veracity of information — they assess what an applicant actually does rather than just what they say they do.

Selection panels need to be able to see applicants in their own schools because somebody can tell wonderful stories, write really, really well, but when it gets down to the nitty-gritty, aren't as supportive of school staff and students and parents as they make out they are. (Series D, 2004)

I think that people selecting for positions — at any promoted level — need to go to their workplaces and see them. Because, otherwise, you can get someone who writes absolutely brilliantly, but really doesn't perform well. So you need to talk to people they work with. (Series D, 2004)

Site visits are a strong method for verification of claims. In the past, panels have tended to believe every word that was written on paper, and site visits counter against this. (Series A, 2003)

Site visits address the issue of the validity of a selection methodology – does it do what it purports to do – and has echoes in the findings of a significant number of researchers in the field of personnel selection generally, such as Derous, Born and De Witte (2004), Gilliland (1994, 1995), Kravitz, Stinson and Chavez (1996), Madigan and Macan (2005), and Rynes and Connerley (1993), as well as in the area of principalship selection methodologies specifically such as Blackmore and Barty (2004), Green (2002), and Gourley et al. (2001).

4.1.3.2 The power of the superintendent

The following comments provide different perspectives on the role of the superintendent in the selection process from those provided above.

For the following participant, the fact that applicants who are current principals are expected to use their superintendent as a referee was problematic for a different reason.

In a recent panel I was involved in, four people were interviewed and three were principals – so the superintendent was the main person giving the referee reports. I question how this can provide a range of opinions. (Series D, 2004)

For a somewhat different slant on this issue, the following participant, while acknowledging the difficulty for current principals of whom they are able to use as referees, expressed the view that applicants needed to take more responsibility for this themselves.

It is an issue where there is a common referee for more than one applicant for a position. This often occurs when applicants are existing principals, and the line-manager referee they have to use is their superintendent. This places a lot of responsibility on the superintendent to know work of applicants well. I know that people complain that superintendents don't know their work, but sometimes I think we ignore

the responsibility that applicants have to be pro-active in ensuring that the superintendent knows their work. (Series A, 2003)

Another participant saw the issue of existing principals having to use the district superintendent as problematic for a different reason:

Recently, on a panel that I've been on, the superintendent was also the Chair of the panel, and s/he gave referee reports for three of the candidates interviewed. It was blatantly obvious from those referee reports who the superintendent thought was the best person for the job. That then became a very difficult situation for the rest of the panel – to argue that that person wasn't the best. (Series D, 2004)

The power of the superintendent in the selection process has been identified by other researchers, such as Barty and Sachs (2004), Blackmore and Barty (2004), Hughes (2004) and Lacey and Gronn (2005a, 2005b).

4.1.3.3 Issues of consistency

The issue of consistency was remarked upon in relation to the use of referee reports.

I think that the status of referee reports has always been a little clouded. Are they of equal weight to the application and the interview or are they just some sort of filtering process? I think that different panels use them differently and I'm not sure that that's good. (Series C, 2003)

I don't think that we use referee reports as effectively as we should. I don't think they are used as a determinant of who gets an interview, and perhaps they should be. It is my experience that people who get interviews, do so on written application and curriculum vitae. Following interview, panels take performance at that into consideration

as well as referee reports. Whereas I am saying that referee verification ought to happen early on because someone might not write a good application, but their referee might provide a context about that person – for example, they might not have written a good application, but they are a fantastic operator, and they are a natural leader, so at least give them a shot at interview. This would counter arguments that it is only people who are good writers who get the jobs. (Series E, 2003)

For the following research participants, the lack of use of the verification of claims in the selection process was a concern.

Verification of claims is an improvement on the old two-referee system, but I don't think it is being used. I got interviewed recently for a Level * position and I put the names of thirteen verifiers. I asked them all later if they had been contacted – not one of them had. The panel stuck with the two referees that I named on the cover sheet. (Series D, 2004)

I think the verification process could be vital, but it is not being used. I believe that the traditional process of using the two nominated referees is still in place – the superintendents may tell you something different, but that's what I see. (Series D, 2004)

I think the verification process is a brilliant idea but I don't think it's being used. I think panels are still going to the two people that are on cover sheet. So maybe that's something that needs to change. Maybe people from HR need to look at that, so that the form reflects the new process. (Series D, 2004)

For the following research participant, it was the issue of consistency in relation to site visits that was of concern.

I think there is merit in using site visits, provided there is internal consistency. So if there are four panel members, either one or

two of them will visit all applicants. This is as opposed to different panel members visiting different workplaces, and then coming back and attempting to be consistent. There needs to be criteria – a checklist of behaviours for example – some sort of recording system of observations that the visitors look for. There is merit in it, but there needs to be some work on developing it. (Series E, 2004)

4.1.3.4 The provision of additional information

The positivity surrounding the elements of verification all related to the fact that this process allowed selection panels to find out more about applicants.

The following comment relates specifically to referee reports.

Referee reports are an important part of the process. Sometimes when candidates are close, they can be very useful. They should be used in these cases. For example, if someone has done very well at interview, but the panel thinks there may be clarification needed on some things, verification should be used then. This allows for claims to be substantiated much more effectively. In the past, people have won jobs purely on interview performance, and we need referee reports to make sure that doesn't happen. (Series D, 2004)

This situation was also true for some research participants in relation to verification of claims.

Verification of claims is critical – from the beginning of the process. What we are about is selecting the best person for the job. It's not about selecting the person who looks or appears to be the best person for the job. But the one who is actually the best person for the job. So you have to have intimate knowledge and accurate knowledge of a person's background in order to make that decision. Now if you

don't even test this out, by checking on what they have said about themselves, if you make a decision to exclude somebody from the interview stage without actually checking thoroughly into their claim to the position, then you're basically going against the merit principle from the outset. (Series C, 2003)

I think we have become better in our use of verification as part of the process. Referees were chosen by candidates because they were going to be favourable and write glowing things about the person. I'm pretty sure that quite a few applicants would have given their application to their referees so that they could confirm things that were said. I'm not sure that that added much to a panel's knowledge of a candidate. (Series D, 2004)

These comments are in line with the work of researchers such as Dunn (1995), Barada (1996), Hardy and Rowe (1999), and Isaacs (1999) who view referee reports as being of value in the additional information they can provide on an applicant.

It was also true in relation to the use of site visits.

We need to encourage the use of site visits. They allow a panel to get a feel for the person as a leader, by enabling them to talk to a range of people who work with the applicant and know their work. It is a much richer form of data gathering. (Series A, 2003)

I can't think of another way than a site visit that would get the range of information you need about a person in order to make an informed decision. You also get a feeling about a school and what is happening there. You can't do that at an interview. (Series B, 2003)

Site visits enable a panel to talk with a range of people who actually work with that person, and who therefore really know their

work. Referees, especially for current principals, often don't work with them, so how do they really know their work?
(Series A, 2003)

The only effective way to promote people is on the basis of their current performance and knowledge. The system still doesn't facilitate that. You can only do that by watching them on the ground, and site visits are the best way to judge how people work. It is ludicrous that we judge people's performance without ever seeing them work. (Series B, 2003)

The following research participant has a slightly different view of the positivity inherent in the use of site visits as a means of garnering additional information. In contrast to the majority of comments, which related to the provision of information for the selection panel, this person's comment relates to the provision of information for the applicant.

Site visits would enable a panel to give positive feedback to applicants about the good things they found during the site visit. We don't have much opportunity for this to occur in our day-to-day work. It would be a significant professional learning opportunity.
(Series A, 2003)

It was felt by some interviewees that site visits, as they currently occur, were not long enough. Therefore, while site visits may have the potential to provide valuable additional information on an applicant, they did not achieve this as fully as may be possible.

Site visits need to be for longer. I believe that, unless we shadow people in their jobs and unless we really get to know how people work, then the process is flawed – significantly flawed. (Series C, 2003)

Site visits need to be for at least a week. This would be a big eye-opener, and would allow the panel to gain a fuller understanding of a person's work. (Series B, 2003)

4.1.3.4 Overview of the effectiveness/verification dimension

Table 13 overviews the findings of this section of the research, and shows that, in general, the elements of the verification aspect of the selection process were perceived more negatively than positively in terms of their effectiveness.

Table 13: Overview of effectiveness/verification comments

Negative aspects	Positive aspects
Veracity of information	Provision of additional information
Power of the superintendent	
Issues of consistency	

4.1.4 The effectiveness/post-selection counselling dimension

Overwhelmingly, interviewees were condemnatory of the effectiveness of post-selection counselling. Of the totality of comments made on this issue, less than one-quarter were positive.

4.1.4.1 Provision of useful information

The majority of comments made about effectiveness and post-selection counselling related to the information that it did or did not provide. By far the most commonly expressed view was the perception that it does not provide any useful information to applicants to assist them with improvement. This aspect of post-selection counselling attracted considerable comment from participants, and evidenced strong feelings about its lack of effectiveness.

I don't bother with it. I have done so a couple of times, but it doesn't give you any information really. My experience has been that the conversation has been about what I didn't say or do at interview – didn't give my best performance, the other person gave a stronger performance etc., etc. What use is

that really? All that does is tell me that Mr or Ms X beat me – that is all it says. How does that help you for next time? It doesn't, because you have a new panel, new people to go against, new questions, probably new length application – all different. So I think that post-selection counselling is useless. (Series D, 2004)

I saw one candidate whom I'm sure was a victim of post-selection counselling because, very early in his applying-for-promotion career, I read one of his applications and it was a good one – articulate and coherent. But I saw the negative evolution of his applications over a number of years. It changed from a coherent application to one that was a real mess. I think that happened because the post-selection counselling he received was rubbish. He was given what I consider to be excuses as to why he hadn't won positions and not appropriate feedback on how he could improve. Whenever he tried to incorporate these excuses that he was given into his application, it got worse, not better. So it depends on how it is done. If you are treating it as an excuse-shop, I think it is a disaster. (Series D, 2004)

It's a total waste of time because panels had to justify why they gave a person the job. Therefore you went in and would get slaughtered in some cases, told unbelievable things and you couldn't figure how they got to that conclusion. Often I have felt humiliated, often very angry. At times I have left a post-selection counselling session questioning the sanity of the people who had made the decision. (Series D, 2004)

I think that by the way in which we are set up, that the panel convenor is so particular about what they tell non-successful applicants in post-selection counselling. I think the level of feedback is fairly light. Maybe that has something to do with the processes around Appeal or Review and making it obvious that the successful

person was the best person. Because we have this process, I think it inhibits what is said and so I don't think post-selection counselling is as effective or as valuable as it could be. (Series E, 2004)

The following comment about the difficulties in providing any useful feedback comes from the perspective of a Panel Chair.

As a Chair on a panel, providing post-selection counselling was really difficult for me because there was so little feedback that I could give to unsuccessful applicants. It simply worked out that the person who got the job was just that much better, given all the factors that we had to consider; but there was nothing wrong with the other applicant. Yet, as Chair, I couldn't really say that. The non-successful applicant wanted information on how they could improve, and in all honesty, I wasn't sure how they could improve. Quite rightly, they would have been able to ask why they didn't. They didn't ask that, but it would have been really difficult to answer, because the successful applicant did it just that much better. But in a sense there wasn't anything I could tell them. (Series E, 2004)

For the following research participant, the fact that post-selection counselling does not provide useful information for applicants is caused by the lack of training provided to those who deliver it.

I think post-selection counselling is critical. I think that it is probably the toughest part of the whole process because you are often dealing with people who are genuinely disappointed and who, in most cases, really want to improve. So it's a big responsibility – you want it to be a good process for them. I think that this is an issue that we as a system need to address. We need to provide training for people on post-selection counselling, so that they can deliver it in a way that makes it a worthwhile experience for applicants. You have to be very clever to deliver it well, because you aren't doing anyone any favours if you aren't absolutely, brutally honest. But at the same time, you

need to give the person the sense of empowerment – that they can improve on this area or that area. For me personally, I know that there have been times when I have provided post-selection counselling and knowing that it has been awful because I haven't known how to do it properly. So I think it is definitely an area that we need to train people to do better at. (Series E, 2004)

The only positive comments expressed about post-selection were related more to what makes it effective than being about it already being effective. The following responses show the positive side of the concerns expressed above.

Comments made in post-selection counselling need to be constructive. There might be some negative comments – that's fine. The idea of the comments is so that the person can actually develop themselves individually and not feel demoralized. People may choose to feel demoralized – that's up to them. But if the comments are constructive, the person's dignity is more likely to stay intact and they'll feel happy about the whole process. (Series D, 2004)

The Chair of the panel did the post-selection counselling well. He spent a lot of time with me, going through my application, offering suggestions for improvement. I learnt a lot from that process from that particular person. That's what post-selection counselling should be like. I know that Panel Chairs have a lot of demands on their time, so it's a matter of balance – between time and doing a good job, but I still believe that post-selection counselling needs to be done well. (Series D, 2004)

I've had lots of post-selection counselling over the years, and some of the stuff that I've found to be really useful said things like, 'you talked about these things but you didn't talk about these things'. So it was specific feedback. It's not things like 'you need to be really sure about processes', 'this is all about access, participation and achievement', those sorts of things – it's not

specific. It's when it is specific, that I find it to be most useful – something I can learn from. You don't just learn about doing better the next time around, you learn about how to do your job better, and I think that that's really important. Look at the time that people have spent collectively – the panel members, the applicants, the referees – there's a lot of resource goes in to that – time, money, energy, emotion. If we don't learn something from the process, then I think there's something wrong. (Series C, 2003)

Concerns about the effectiveness of post-selection counselling in this research echo the findings by other researchers such as Derous, Born and De Witte (2004), Gilliland (1994, 1995), Polyhart, Ryan and Bennett (1999), and Schuler (1993), in the area of personnel selection generally; and Carlin et al. (2003), Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, ACT (2003) Lacey and Gronn (2005a, 2005b), and Neidhart and Carlin (2003) in the area of perceptions of principalship selection more specifically.

4.1.4.2 Issues of consistency

The following comments evidence concern over the lack of consistency in the provision of post-selection counselling. This perceived lack of consistency was of considerable concern to interviewees and could be seen as allied to the theme above – that it does not provide any useful information to applicants.

I've had post-selection counselling on a number of different occasions and I always get mixed messages or feedback. One panel will tell me one thing and another panel will tell me something completely different and yet the two things [my performances] will have been identical. So I don't have a lot of faith in it. (Series C, 2003)

It's a very arbitrary system – it's very subjective. What turns one panel on won't

turn another panel on, so I'm not sure that it serves any great purpose. I'm not sure it actually helps what needs to be helped. It's never improved my performance in applying or whatever. And it's often made me fairly angry at the panel person that I'm speaking to, because it often shows up as a huge narrowness or a huge bias on their part. (Series B, 2003)

I don't think it is done well. I think it is because, despite each panel being trained, there is too much inconsistency about the sort of information that is given to unsuccessful applicants. (Series C, 2003)

I think that the quality of post-selection counselling is variable. So it very much depends on that person's perception of what a candidate needs to do to be successful in the future. The person providing the counselling may draw on their own experiences as an applicant and as a principal to provide that. Maybe if there is a set of dot-points that all Chairs had to follow when providing post-selection counselling, that would tighten it up – provide consistency. Things such as application length, whether it was verbose, succinct for instance, interview – to the point, round in circles; those kind of things – a simple checklist that could guide the counselling. (Series E, 2004)

One interviewee expressed the belief that the inconsistency in the way that post-selection counselling is received depends more on the recipient than on the provider.

I think that people's experience of post-selection counselling may vary according to how the person is feeling. Unsuccessful candidates are likely to be feeling disgruntled and negative anyway, so I'm not sure that they are going to take whatever they are told on board. It is probably not what they are going to want to hear in many cases. So because they are going to feel aggrieved, they may respond by saying 'it wasn't worth it'. Whereas, I think that if

people go in with the ultimate aim of improving, and if the feedback provided is specific, then they can see it as valuable. So those two variables may make a difference as to how people perceive it. If people go in with an axe to grind, then no matter what they are told, they will feel negative. (Series E, 2004)

This issue of lack of consistency is another one that has been reported in other research, such as that of Blackmore and Barty (2004), Hawkins (1991), Lacey and Gronn (2005a, 2005b, 2005c), and Wendel and Breed (1988).

4.1.4.3 Overview of effectiveness/post-selection counselling dimension

Table 14 overviews the findings of this section of the research, and shows that, in general, post-selection counselling is perceived more negatively than positively in terms of its effectiveness.

Table 14: Overview of effectiveness/post-selection counselling comments

Negative aspects	Positive aspects
Provision of useful information	Provision of useful information
Issues of consistency	

4.1.5 The effectiveness/process as a whole dimension

Two major sub-themes emerged from the comments made about the effectiveness of the process as a whole: it does not pick the best person for the job; and timing issues. All comments made were negative.

4.1.5.1 Does not pick the best person for the job

By far the majority of comments made about the process's lack of effectiveness were about the perception that it does not pick the best person for the job.

I honestly don't see how the current process can pick the best person for the job. It picks a good person, but I don't think there is any clear way of defining what is meant by the 'best person' under our current process. On all the panels I've been on, the conversation always comes down to 'they're all good, they were all fantastic at interview, and how do we separate them'? So because there is no more evidence, it comes down to really pathetic little hairs that we split – you know, 'this person didn't say this', 'that person didn't say that'. We're talking about someone's life here and we're going to make a decision on trivial things. (Series D, 2004)

It picks good people but there's no way that it picks the best. I've been on panels where the best person – the one that I knew to be the best because I knew all the candidates and their work really well, how they were seen by their community – hadn't won because of their performance at interview and the way that they wrote their application. Those two things just put them too far behind. There were other people on the panel who didn't know the candidates as well, who didn't know how they operated – they only knew what they saw, through application and interview, because they had never met them before. So, I know that the process has stood in the way of the best person winning the position. (Series D, 2004)

I don't think the process is rigorous enough. I don't think it works. I think it picks a good person – I have no doubt about that. You have to be fairly good to get an interview these days, but I don't think it then picks the best person. How can it pick the best

person if three panel members all read the same applications and interview X number of people and pick person Y, but three other panel members pick a totally different field and pick a totally different person. How then, can they both be picking the best person? It can only ever be the panel's perception of the best person. (Series D, 2004)

This process is not the best process for getting the best person for the job. It is not resourced adequately to enable that to happen. It is designed to be done quickly and get onto the next thing. The system is not matching resources to the importance of the selection process. (Series A, 2003)

Time constraints work against the aim of getting the best person for the job. In the end, is it getting the best person for the job or is it getting a person within a set timeframe? (Series C, 2003)

A possible solution for the above situation is offered by the following research participant.

I believe that panels should be held accountable for their selection – as they are in private enterprise. If they make the wrong decision, they should be held accountable. Therefore, some biases that happen in some panels, wouldn't occur any more – or not as much. The accountability would make panels focus on whether they really had the right person. (Series D, 2004)

4.1.5.2 Timing issues

For some research participants, the process was seen as being ineffective because of when it is held during the year.

Where possible, I think middle term would be a good time to advertise vacancies for a number of reasons. If vacancies were advertised in middle term, then the successful applicant could look at taking up

that position the following year, but they could have some lead-in time in term three – just to start the ball rolling – start background reading, undertake site visits – so that they are not going in cold. As well, the period from Easter to the end of term one might also be a good time for advertisements of vacancies, because that is not such a busy time in schools. (Series E, 2004)

We still haven't got the timing for panels right. So often, we are in a situation when, because of the time of the year, it a matter of sticking to a very tight timeline in order to get the principals appointed and into their schools ready to begin the next school year. In itself, that is a really good goal to have. However, perhaps the expediency might have increased the pressure that panels felt to complete the process and that they may not then have used some of the selection techniques available to them. (Series E, 2004)

I think the time of the year that a panel is held does make a difference. Late in the year is a problem – it's a pretty awkward time for a principal. You have reports to read and make comments on, you have the Annual Report and plans for next year looming along with a myriad of other things, like end-of-year assemblies, staffing etc. A lot of staff issues too – there's a lot on. You seem to be out of the school a lot more at this time of the year, so being out for the panel makes it even more difficult. (Series D, 2004)

More thought needs to go into when vacancies are advertised. I think second term or early third term would be a good time to have panels. I think most people find it difficult to be taken out of their school this late in the year. This is certainly true for panel members, but also for applicants. (Series D, 2004)

Others perceived the process as being ineffective because of not enough time being allowed for the process.

We need to be serious about the time needed to do the process properly. We need to make the time available to a panel to talk about common understanding of the principalship before meeting to shortlist. There needs to be a rich conversation about that particular job – the level of the job, its sector, and its context – the particular school community. Within the current timeframe, that is impossible. (Series A, 2003)

We need to really allow for the time needed to put a process in place to select the best person for the job. The theory says that this happens, but it doesn't. As a panel, we were advised of timelines that had to be met, so we were not able to shape process fully the way we would have wanted. The panel had the view that taking the time needed to do the job well was important, but we felt pressured to complete the process speedily. (Series A, 2003)

The timing of vacancies being so late and having to fit into a short timeframe is an issue. At my interview today, the panel was very keen to move the process quickly so that the nominee for the position could be notified before the end of the school year. Wouldn't it be better if positions were advertised in second term instead of third term – for everyone concerned? (Series D, 2004)

4.1.5.3 The merit principle

For some research participants, the process was ineffective because of their perception that the merit principle is not applied.

The lack of understanding of the merit principle is a big issue. The last panel that I was on, it wasn't mentioned once in our discussions. That needs to be at the

forefront of the process – whereas I would estimate that it is probably mentioned only about 10% of the time. (Series D, 2004)

My experience is that panel members don't understand the process. They don't understand the merit principle. Part of the merit principle is proven ability in the role you are going into. In my view, that's never explored – not on any panel I've been on. (Series B, 2003)

Research in other settings has uncovered similar results, with the work of Lacey (2002), Pritchard (2003), Lacey and Gronn (2005a, 2005b), Blackmore and Barty (2004), and Hughes (2004) revealing a loss of confidence in the merit principle and its application.

4.1.5.4 Overview of the effectiveness/process as a whole dimension

Table 15 overviews the findings of this section of the research, and shows that the process as a whole was perceived totally negatively in terms of its effectiveness, with no positive comments being expressed by participants in the research.

Table 15: Overview of effectiveness/process as a whole comments

Negative aspects	Positive aspects
Does not pick the best person for the job	
Timing issues	
The merit principle	

4.1.6 Summary of effectiveness comments

The theme of whether or not the selection process is effective was the one that drew the most comment from participants in the research. Of the total

'effectiveness' comments made (162), the majority (110) were about the ineffectiveness of the process.

4.2 Fairness

In comparison to the notion of effectiveness, the sub-theme of whether or not the process was perceived as being fair attracted considerably less comment.

On the issue of the fairness of the process, in its component parts as well as a totality, by far the majority of people who commented felt that it was not fair.

4.2.1 The fairness/application dimension

Participants expressed a range of views on the fairness of the application component of the selection process. However, there was a clear trend in that the majority of comments were about lack of fairness.

A number of sub-themes were discernible within the comments made about the fairness of the application part of the process: someone else's work; word limits; the use of an unspoken 'formula' for successful applications; the flexibility of formats; and the lack of the use of curriculum vitae. Only one of these, the use of word limits, attracted any positive comments.

4.2.1.1 Whose work is it?

The issue that attracted the most comment in relation to applications and fairness was that it may not be clear whose work it is that is being measured. Interestingly, this area of concern also attracted considerable comment in relation to the perceived ineffectiveness of the process (see section 4.1.1.2). Again, the idea that written applications are being used as a discriminator between applicants, when they may not be written by the people who submit them, is a cause of angst.

Everyone seeks opinions and advice on their applications. How fair is that to judge people on an application, which may not even be the applicant's own work? (Series A, 2003)

There is a story going around, and I've heard it quite a few times, about a person who helped a colleague to write their application and put them through a mock interview process. They helped them well, because the person they assisted, won the job. The person doing the assisting was the chair of the panel. I don't think that is fair – or ethical. (Series B, 2003)

There's a lot of cheating that goes on as far as I'm concerned. When I say cheating, that's probably too harsh a word, but sometimes I know that people have got interviews when the application hasn't been written by them, and I think that's unfair. (Series D, 2004)

The above comments relates to the validity of the process, in being able to measure what it purports to; in this case, the work of the actual applicant. It echoes findings in other research, such as that of Blackmore and Barty (2004), Gourley et al. (2001), and Green (2002).

4.2.1.2 Word limits

The issue of word limits attracted considerable comment in terms of how effective, or not, it made the process (see section 4.1.1.1). As indicated in the following comments, it was also the focus of discussion in terms of its impact on fairness.

Panels can ask for a specific type of application (500 words, 1000 words etc.) but must consider all applications, whatever format they have been written in. This can be a potential disadvantage to applicants who abided by the requirements and have written 1000 words for example, if they are

measured against someone who hasn't and has written 3000 words. (Series B, 2003)

The issue of word limits is a difficult one. I mean the panels don't think 'this is a 1000 word limit and this is a 1500 word application; so I'm stopping at 1000, I'm not reading the rest'. You do anyway. Some people would have written a lot more than 1000 words. I think that it does give them a bit more of an opportunity to expand on their examples. So that is to their advantage. I don't know how you overcome that. (Series D, 2004)

This new flexible application format is even less equitable than the old one. Panels can now ask for applications of as low as 1000 words. This gives applicants even less opportunity to sell themselves to the panel as being worthy of an interview. (Series B, 2003)

In comparison to the amount of feedback indicating a perception that applications are not fair, less than one-sixth of the total were positive, and were made exclusively about the issue of word limits. Whilst this aspect of the process came in for considerable criticism in regard to low word limits and variable word limits, some research participants were appreciative of it.

The imposing of the 3000-word limit was a good idea. It made the whole process more equitable. (Series D, 2004)

What we're looking at in the application part of the process is fair because each person has the right to present themselves in the best possible light in their application. Now, given that there is a word restriction for all applicants, I think that's fair. (Series A, 2003)

4.2.1.3 The unspoken 'formula' for success

Another concern for some research participants was the view that there was a 'right' way to present an application, and that this successful 'formula' becomes known.

I guess over time that the applications have ended up being fairly similar in their style and I'm not sure that they have to be. I'm not sure that it has to be so formula driven. I'm not sure how else it could be, but I think that we have ended up with a situation that once you know the formula you potentially are advantaged against an applicant who may be equally as worthy but who hasn't picked up the recipe if you like that will give you the leverage. (Series D, 2004)

What happens is that successful applications get spread around fairly quickly and the style of the successful applications gets reproduced. I'm not sure that's fair. (Series C, 2003)

4.2.1.4 Overview of fairness/application dimension

Table 16 overviews the findings of this section of the research, and shows that, in general, applications were perceived considerably more negatively than positively in terms of their fairness.

Table 16: Overview of fairness/application comments

Negative aspects	Positive aspects
Someone else's work	Word limits
Word limits	
Use of an unspoken 'formula'	

4.2.2 The fairness/interview dimension

In terms of the fairness or otherwise of the interview part of the process, participants who commented perceived there to be more positive aspects of the process than negative.

A number of sub-themes were identifiable within the comments made about the fairness of the interview aspect of the selection process: timing issues; the exploration of applicants' understanding; and the 'weighting' given to interviews.

4.2.2.1 Timing issues

For the majority of interviewees who commented negatively on the fairness aspect of interviews, the issue of timing was the one that concerned them most.

Interviewing someone at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, as happened to me for this last job, is silly. I think in that case – it would obviously have been a large field – it should have gone over a couple of days – to be fair to both candidates and panel members. I know that you can't interview anyone at 4 o'clock in the afternoon – especially someone who works in a really tough school. This undersells the process, it undersells the profession. It's not fair. (Series D, 2004)

I think that the timing of interviews can be a problem. Some times are better than others. It's the luck of the draw when you get, depending on how the panel does it – whether they do it alphabetically, distance to travel or whatever. But do we want the luck of the draw in deciding a principal position and someone's career? I don't think so. (Series D, 2003)

In contrast, the following research participant perceived interviews as being fair because of the consideration given to the time during the day when they are held.

Some people would say that the time of day when you are interviewed is important. Some believe it is best to be interviewed early in the day; so that you become the benchmark, the person to beat. Others would say that perhaps having the 'graveyard' time after lunch is disadvantageous – that the panel has heard everything already. Again, other people think that being last is advantageous – if your interview is very good, that is what the panel will remember. Personally I don't think it matters. The timing has to suit the applicants – allow for how long they have to travel etc. If people are coming from longer distances, their needs to be catered for. And maybe, if they are within an hour commute of where the interviews are being held, their names can be put in a hat and assigned random times. If they are further away, they can be given the choice of when they have their interview. That would be fair. I think that we have to trust panels to be fair to all applicants regardless of when their interview is. (Series D, 2004)

4.2.2.2 The exploration of applicants' understanding

For the majority of interviewees who expressed the view that interviews are fair, this was because interviews allowed panels to explore an applicant's contextual understandings.

The interview procedure that I went through today has changed drastically from experience I have had in the past. I was given a question 10 minutes beforehand and then I had three other questions that were broad-based but extremely relevant to the school. And there were subsidiary questions which came out of those and finally, and this has always been the case, you were given the chance to add anything

else you wanted to. But I found the questions extremely fair. Anyone today who knew the school and the District couldn't come away feeling any other way but satisfied that the questions were fair. (Series D, 2003)

You could not have got a fairer interview than the one I had today, and that's saying something because I have been to lots of interviews. The questions were broad. You could apply your knowledge from any school to the school I applied for, but you also had to have knowledge of that school and that's how I think it should be. Not only knowledge of the school but also of the community. For example, one of the questions was about the leadership qualities I have that would be of benefit to the school. You had to know the school and its characteristics to be able to answer that well. (Series D, 2004)

4.2.2.3 Too heavily weighted

Along similar lines to a view expressed earlier in relation to interviews being ineffective because they were too heavily weighted in the selection process, some research participants believed that this made the process unfair. Hughes (2004) reported similar findings.

I don't like the interview process at all. How do you win a job by talking to people for forty minutes? But that happens all the time. If we believe that that's a fair way of promoting people, then we believe in fairies. (Series D, 2003)

4.2.2.4 Overview of fairness/interview dimension

Table 17 overviews the findings of this section of the research. It shows that, in general, and in contrast to all other findings in the research, applications were perceived more equally in terms of their fairness.

Table 17: Overview of fairness/interview comments

Negative aspects	Positive aspects
Timing issues	The exploration of applicant's understanding
Too heavily weighted	Timing issues

4.2.3 The fairness/verification dimension

The issue of verification, in its three aspects — referee reports, verification of claims, and site visits — attracted considerable comment from interviewees in relation to effectiveness – or its lack of. In relation to the fairness of verification, no comments were evident.

4.2.4 The fairness/post-selection counselling dimension

As with referee reports, the issue of post-selection counselling, which attracted considerable comment from interviewees in relation to effectiveness (or its lack of), attracted no comments from interviewees in relation to fairness.

4.2.5 The fairness/process as a whole dimension

As with whether or not it was effective, the process in general was not highly regarded in the fairness stakes, being perceived by only one interviewee as being fair.

A number of sub-themes were identified in the comments made about fairness and the process in general: a centralised panel; the power of the known; the power of the superintendent; timing issues; and veracity of information.

4.2.5.1 A centralised panel

For the majority of interviewees who made comment on the fairness of the process as a whole, it was the issue of not having a centralised panel that was responsible for all principal selection across the state which drew the most comment. The idea of having a centralised panel (either fully or in part) was seen as being a more fair way to undertake the selection process. The major reason for this was seen to be an increase in the levels of consistency of process and the subsequent decisions that come from the process.

A centralised panel would mean that jobs wouldn't be given to people purely on performance at an interview. This would be a lot fairer too if a panel from another area of the state came to another part, because you're not necessarily known to those people and can't be pre-judged. In my case, I think I'm disadvantaged because I'm currently working out of the sector where I have spent a lot of my working life. Therefore I am not as well known to most panel members. A central panel would mean a more level playing field. (Series D, 2004)

Having a central panel comprised of recently retired principals who are contracted for one year to undertake the work would be much better than what we have now. It would improve consistency and that's really important. For instance, if they interview a person for one job and their application is a bit suspect, they know that they can take that into account the next time that person applies. I think that would be much fairer. (Series D, 2004)

Having a central panel whose job it is to check up on people when they apply for positions would be good. It would give a greater breadth of understanding about the broad range of applicants because that is all they would be doing. This would make

comparisons between applicants more valid and much fairer. (Series B, 2003)

This issue of the expectation of consistency within the selection process has echoes in the work of Blackmore and Barty (2004), Gronn and Lacey (2005a), Hawkins (1991), Lacey and Gronn (2005a, 2005b), and Wendel and Breed (1988) whose research revealed concerns with consistency of processes used by panels and the decisions reached by them.

As with so much of the research findings, here is another example where the same issue — in this case the notion of having some form of centralisation of the process — attracted polarized views. Below is a counter view to the ones above which saw the use of a centralised panel as a positive step.

I know that some people think it is unfair if they get an interview for one position and not for another. I don't necessarily see that as a bad thing. People say that we should have a centralised panel or perhaps one person who sits on every principalship panel across the state, that it should be standardized. But why? Do we want everyone to be picked out of the same mould? I don't really think so. Having a variety of panels reflects the variety of communities and the variety of circumstances in the principalship — and a variety of ways of looking at the world. That probably gives us a more robust system than a system that people think can be calibrated against itself. (Series D, 2004)

4.2.5.2 The power of the known

For some research participants, fairness of the process was impinged upon by their view that people win jobs because of the power of elements of 'the known' — on who they know rather than what they know, because they are known by the panel, or because the decision is already decided.

You'll always have people who have influence to get jobs and that will basically always happen. So therefore you'll always

have frustrated people like me who can't interview well and who are penalized because of that. (Series D, 2004)

Decisions are made, not on whether they [the panel] really had the right person ... (but) on whether or not they know the person. People win jobs because they are known to panel members. (Series D, 2004)

People who are better known by panel members do better in the selection process. Panel members make allowances if they know that someone hasn't performed as well as they know they could. (Series A, 2003)

In the case of the superintendent who didn't know my work, people won jobs on how well they got on with that person, now how well they did their job. (Series D, 2004)

The inconsistency of the whole process and the perception that some jobs are already rigged has done that [turned people off applying again] ...in one district there was something like nine or ten principal jobs and everyone knew in advance who would get every one of them – and they were right! So what's the use of applying – when you waste all that time and you know you won't get the job. (Series D, 2004)

This is similar to the findings of Gronn and Lacey (2005a, 2005b), and Blackmore and Barty (2004) whose research revealed a perception that applicants who were known by panels were favoured over those who weren't.

4.2.5.3 The power of the superintendent

This issue is similar in part to the one above, in terms of the role of the superintendent in the provision of referee reports. Here the power of this position is discussed by research participants more broadly in the perception

of its ability to have an influence on the outcome of the selection, and how, in turn, this impacts on the fairness of the selection process.

A lot of panel members, I feel, are not willing to challenge the perception of the superintendent. Every panel I've been on, the superintendent has been on – every single panel. My perception is that often you have to judge how far you are willing to push your point of view with the superintendent, because realistically, they will be looking at you next time you apply for a job. (Series D 2004)

In the case of the superintendent who didn't know my work, people won jobs on how well they got on with that person, now how well they did their job. (Series D, 2004)

Recently, on a panel that I've been on, the superintendent was also the Chair of the panel, and s/he gave referee reports for three of the candidates interviewed. It was blatantly obvious from those referee reports who the superintendent thought was the best person for the job. That then became a very difficult situation for the rest of the panel – to argue that that person wasn't the best. (Series D 2004)

I believe that some people – especially in principal jobs, so it's often the superintendent – wants a particular type of person to run that particular school for particular reasons. They have a different, global sort of view. (Series D 2004)

I've been on panels where it was blatantly obvious that it was personal – because of one person's, the superintendent's, perceptions of an applicant. (Series D 2004)

This finding accords with those of Barty and Sachs (2004), Blackmore and Barty (2004), Hughes (2004), and Lacey and Gronn (2005a, 2005b) whose research also revealed concerns about the power of the superintendent to affect selection decisions.

4.2.5.4 Veracity of information

Echoing a similar concern as that expressed above, an issue for the following research participant was their view that people could cheat within the interview process, and that made it unfair.

People get disillusioned with the process because people can cheat within the process, like getting someone to write their application for them, getting help with the main [pre-prepared] question system. (Series D, 2004)

For the following research participant, it was the fact that s/he felt that data can now be used to support their claims that made the process fair.

At my interview today, I had my SIR [School Improvement Review] results and I could say that 100% of my staff thinks I'm an excellent leader and 95% of parents in the school support our behaviour management policy. I had the statistics to back up what I was saying. (Series D, 2004)

Another participant held the view that the fairness of the process was enhanced because panels can use a variety of ways of finding out about applicants.

I think that the emphasis having been taken off application as the main selection technique is great. So now, I don't have to be the type of person who can write in that 'recipe' style to be successful. I can demonstrate, using a variety of styles that I'm worth a closer look. It is much fairer now that we are not judging success at writing an application. (Series A, 2003)

4.2.5.5 Timing issues

The timing of panels was again an issue, with a perceived lack of fairness occurring because of the time during the year that selection processes were

held. This echoes a view held by some research participants (see above) that this aspect of the process also made it ineffective.

The thing I find really distressing is that a lot of these jobs are advertised right towards the end of the year, when all the stress and pressure is on people in schools. It's absolutely ridiculous. They know, in principle, who will be retiring. Those people may not retire until the end of the year, but I believe that the interviews need to happen in second term. It's not fair to ask people to do this when they are so busy at work.
(Series D, 2004)

4.2.5.6 Overview of the fairness/process as a whole dimension

Table 18 overviews the findings of this section of the research, and shows that, in general, the process as a whole was perceived more negatively than positively in terms of its fairness.

Table 18: Overview of fairness/process as a whole comments

Negative aspects	Positive aspects
A centralised panel	A centralised panel
The power of the known	Veracity of information
The power of the superintendent	
Veracity of information	
Timing issues	

Despite the fact that comments on the fairness of the process, either as a whole or in its component parts, were not as prolific as those relating to effectiveness, the general trend was that it was seen by three-quarters of the interviewees who commented as being unfair.

4.2.6 Summary of fairness comments

While the theme of whether or not the selection process is fair, did not attract as many comments as did whether or not it was effective, the majority of comments made indicate that research participants did not consider it to be fair. Of the total 'effectiveness' comments made (34), the majority (26) were about the ineffectiveness of the process.

4.3 Cost

The third major theme identified was the cost of the process. While the previous themes of effectiveness and fairness lent themselves to sub-grouping into the component parts of the process, this was not possible with the issue of cost. Despite this, a number of sub-themes did emerge: the financial dimension; the emotional cost for applicants; the cost for panel members; and, the cost for the system as a whole.

In looking at effectiveness and fairness, it was possible to discern a certain polarity of views. However, all the comments made about the theme of cost reflected negative views about the costs associated with the process.

4.3.1 The cost/financial cost dimension

Without exception, people who talked about the financial cost of the process held the view that it needs to be better resourced than it is currently. In effect, they believed that the process is inhibited due to the fact that it is under-resourced.

Here we are choosing people who are responsible for the education of our young and the amount of resource we put into it is zilch. (Series A, 2003)

I think we need a better system to select principals. If these positions are really important, and I believe that they are because principals can make or break a

school, we ought to be putting more resources in to having a team of people across the state that is trained comprehensively in being truly effective selectors. These people would be in schools, but there would be the capacity there to enable them to come out of their schools to serve on panels to help other panel members to be more effective. (Series A, 2003)

It's about time people started looking at resource efficiency against quality outcome. You're not going to get a quality outcome if you're going to scrimp. Maybe the way to go is to say that the principal position is so important that we've got to invest significantly in making sure we get the selection procedure right. (Series A, 2003)

People will say that we're not going to spend additional resources on the selection process, so we'll continue to stay in the situation that we're currently in – with a process that isn't as authentic as it should be. (Series B, 2003)

4.3.2 The cost/cost for applicants dimension

The comments made about the cost for applicants of participation in the selection process were all related to the emotional toll that the process exerts. This aspect drew the most comment, in terms of the cost of the selection process, from interviewees. For the majority of people, the cost of the process to themselves as applicants was an emotional one – a negative impact on how they see themselves, how they interact with others, how they do their job.

The whole experience is too stressful – on you, on your family, on everybody. So you can't put people through that too many times. For me, I'm now much more selective about what I'll put in for. If a position came up that I thought really suited me, I'd apply, but not for everything. That's what I've done in the past – applied for everything, but not any more. I'll have to be really sure that I

want something badly to put myself through the process again. (Series D, 2004)

I am still bitter about a job that I lost last year, one that I had acted in. I was asked to act because of the work I had done in this school in relation to, and that was what was needed in that school. I went in there and was able to in one term. The parent body and the staff were very supportive of me and made sure that the superintendent knew that. I lost the job to a person who came across much, much better at the interview than I did – very persuasive. His/her current school wasn't all that happy with him/her, but because s/he did well at interview, s/he got the job. When I spoke to my superintendent about why I didn't get the job, I was told that the other person came across very well in the interview. When I brought up the dissatisfaction with his/her performance in his/her school, I was told that they had phoned his/her referees and they had supported him/her. And yet, everyone else in the whole area knew that s/he wasn't going well. (Series D, 2003)

Applying [for a principalship] is just so hard. It gets me down, so for a week or so I don't do my job here at school well because I'm depressed. I go home and I'm grumpy, so my family has a hard time for a while. There have been times in the past when I've lost all my confidence, not believing that I'm any good at the job I'm doing – all of that stuff. (Series C, 2003)

I think going for a principalship is like baring your soul. There is no humanity in the process – it's degrading. (Series D, 2004)

I know it's a big workforce, but people are being so hurt because of what happens to them when they apply for promotion. (Series E, 2004)

I wasn't at all relaxed when I came out of the interview. I kept thinking that it was much worse than I thought it could possibly

be. I'm not saying that just because I didn't get the job. I knew that I hadn't got it as soon as I walked out – that I'd given the job away. That doesn't make me too happy. I was fine a couple of days later. I thought 'well this is water under the bridge. I just want to be put out of my agony now'. But when the letter arrives and you are put out of your agony, you sort of go through it all again. You think, 'well, where do I go from here'? (Series C, 2003)

These views are consistent with research findings by Hughes (2004), Lacey (2000b, 2000c 2002a, 2004), and Lacey and Gronn (2005a, 2005b) in the area of perceptions of principalship selection specifically; and with Derous, Born and De Witte (2004) and Madigan and Macan (2005) in the area of personnel selection more broadly.

For quite a few interviewees, post-selection counselling was most responsible for the emotional toll.

I know of people who won't seek counselling because they don't think there is any point in doing so. It makes them feel bad and doesn't offer them anything to help. (Series D, 2004)

Sometimes post-selection counselling does more damage than good. When panels use it to justify their decision, that can happen. I'm not talking just about my own experiences here, but I have spoken with colleagues who have had post-selection counselling who have virtually been berated for their application – had things said to them like, 'how dare you waste my time by applying'? That is absolutely discouraging for people. I know of one person who had that experience who will never apply for a principalship again. (Series D, 2004)

Post-selection counselling shouldn't be a traumatic experience for people, and I think at times, it has been. It should be about providing people with information about how they can improve in the future. In many respects, post-selection counselling is the

poor relation in the selection process, and we have to get better at it. It's really about coaching, and making people feel good about themselves. As a system, we have not spent enough time working with people so that when they are on panels, they can do this part of the process well. (Series E, 2004)

As noted earlier in this chapter, concern over post-selection counselling has been identified as an issue in the findings of other researchers such as Derous, Born and De Witte (2004), Gilliland (1994, 1995), Polyhart, Ryan and Bennett (1999), and Schuler (1993), in the area of personnel selection generally; and Carlin et al. (2003), Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, ACT (2003) Lacey and Gronn (2005a, 2005b), and Neidhart and Carlin (2003) in the area of perceptions of principalship selection more specifically.

4.3.3 The cost/cost for panel members dimension

Two sub-themes were apparent in the comments about the cost for panel members: the time involved and the stress involved.

4.3.3.1 The time involved in the process

In reflecting on their time as panel members, some people found the process to be costly in terms of the time needed to undertake the process and the stress generated by their involvement.

The reading time took a long time. We had twenty-five applicants. If they each only write the minimum of 1000 words – that's 25000 words to read. As well, some of them were writing 2000 or 3000 words in their extended CV, so that's a lot to get through and a lot to digest. So that's why I could only read two at a time and space it out. So several weekends went into this for me. I got up early in the morning to read mine – I'm not much use after a busy day at school.

So I would read one or two early in the morning before I went to school. I chose not to do them at school, so school wasn't affected, but certainly home was. It took a lot of my own personal time after you've had a full day at work. (Series D, 2004)

For panel members, the reading of applications is very intensive. I could do two, and then I would have to go away and leave them. There was no way that I could sit down and read six in a row. Do two, get up and go away because there is a lot of thought going into each one. I think it's hard on panel members, but that is probably the way it should be. (Series D, 2004)

This issue of the time-consuming nature of the selection process also formed part of the research findings of Barty and Sachs (2004), Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, ACT (2003), Gourley et al. (2001), Hughes (2004), and Lacey (2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2004).

4.3.3.2 The stress involved in the process

For some interviewees it was the stress involved in being a panel member that was an issue.

As a panel member, I think it is really difficult when you have a number of applicants who could do the job admirably. I find that a really challenging task, one that I am not comfortable with. (Series A, 2003)

All this process does is add extra stress to the people who are trying to do the job. They're trying to do a really, really good job in a really, really bad process. They know that they're having to do things that really stress them – having to shortcut things, having to make decisions that don't feel right. (Series B, 2003)

4.3.4 The cost/cost for the system dimension

Three sub-themes emerged from the comments made about the cost of the process to the system as a whole: it discourages people from continuing to apply; it discourages people from applying at all; and it has a negative impact on people's current work.

4.3.4.1 Discourages people from continuing to apply

The cost to the system was the dimension of the process that drew the second largest number of comments from interviewees. It was a concern for a significant number of the interviewees, who saw the cost to the system as being in two major areas: that the process discourages people to keep applying for the principalship; and that it impacts negatively on people's capacity to do their current job, albeit temporarily.

Many people articulated the view that the process was such a negative experience for some people that it discouraged them from applying for the principalship again. This result has a detrimental effect on both the depth and breadth of the fields of applicants applying for principalship vacancies.

Applying for a position is a very emotional experience. You are putting up your hand to say, 'look at me' and there might be ten others applying for a position – so nine are going to get their hands knocked down. From a system-wide point of view, I just wish that the whole process wasn't so tough on some people – to the point where they won't apply again. (Series D, 2004)

I believe that people's experiences with the promotion system turn them off applying. The inconsistency of the whole process and the perception that some jobs are already rigged has done that. In one district there was something like nine or ten principal jobs advertised, and everyone knew in advance who would get every one of them – and they were right! So what's the use of applying – when you waste all that time and

you know you won't get the job. (Series B, 2003)

I think the system is stopping people from applying for positions because of the fact that it is seen as a daunting process. We need to make it so that it is not so confrontational – which it is at the moment. I don't shy away from confrontation. But I've seen people virtually destroyed. They have left the interview and wish they'd said this or that. We all do that. But, that person, in terms of the experience they have just had, has got to be a fairly strong person if they will go back and do it again. (Series E, 2004)

I know loads of people who say that they will never do it again. They have done one or two interviews and had a really bitter experience and they will not apply for a position again – they won't put themselves through that again. (Series D, 2004)

I know a number of people, who were highly experienced and skilled, who have become very embittered by their experiences with the selection process. That's a huge shame — that we are losing some excellent people due to the process. They have felt so bad about a particular process they might have been through that they make the decision not to put themselves through it again. Are you going to feel good about your employer if that's the way they treat you? I don't think so. (Series E, 2004)

One interviewee singled out post-selection counselling as being the reason people felt discouraged from continuing their quest for a principalship.

I think post-selection counselling discourages people from having another go. There are no positives in it. Unless it's a learning experience and you think, 'ok I've learnt something that will help me to do better next time', I don't think that it's good. (Series D, 2004)

4.3.4.2 Discourages people from applying at all

The following research participant held the view that the process stopped people from applying from the principalship at all.

At the moment, lots of people aren't applying for promotion because it's such a horrific process. And while they'd like to be there [in the principalship] they're not prepared to put themselves through what is a very arduous and painful exercise. (Series B, 2003)

Some interviewees offered a counter view – that if the process discourages people, then perhaps that is a good thing.

When people are turned off by the process, the tougher side of me says that that is a statement about the person more than it is about the system. That has happened to me. I, and I know others, have walked out of interviews and thought I had done the most appalling job and think, 'whatever made me think I could do that'? My first reaction to that has been, 'I will never ever put myself through that again'. But the next day, my reaction has been 'I will never ever be that bad at an interview again'. It's a part of the process I guess, but is that not about emotional intelligence and resilience, and assuming that you can always improve? How people react to this type of thing is more reflective of them as people than it is of the process. (Series E, 2004)

I think panels are about selecting the best person for the job. And I think that there is a level of having to prove yourself, to demonstrate that you are the best person. Therefore I think that you need to be able to show who you are as an individual, and to do that, in a sense, unsupported because, in reality, that is part of the job – standing up and being unsupported and being able to communicate, in whatever way, what it is that you think ought to be happening and to be able to lead or demonstrate or direct, coach people to head in a certain direction.

So I think you have to have a certain toughness. I guess that if you can't survive the selection process, then you may not be able to survive the principalship. (Series A, 2003)

The down-side of the whole process is that is tough, it's not easy, it can be very uncomfortable. But so is the job we are going into. I think that is a real dilemma really – about making the process, not necessarily easy enough, but supported enough to make people want to undertake it, but at the end of the day, the jobs you are going for are not easy jobs, so the process should reflect that, and so has to be rigorous. (Series E, 2004)

This position is consistent with the research that found that the selection process is a significant contributing factor in the declining numbers of applicants for principalship positions. This research includes that by Blackmore and Barty (2004), Barty and Sachs (2004), Carlin et al. (2003), Dorman and d'Arbon (2003), Gronn and Lacey (2005a, 2005b), Gronn and Rawlings-Saenei (2003) Lacey (2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2004), Neidhart and Carlin (2003), and Pritchard (2003).

4.3.4.3 Impact on people's current work

For some interviewees, it was the negative impact on their current work that was of concern.

The whole process impacts negatively on people's current performance in their schools. Being an applicant for promotion is very demanding and distracting. You become preoccupied with the panel, and as a result of that your productivity dips a bit. (Series C, 2003)

The process is too demanding. It takes a lot of time and energy to engage in it – to write a good application, to participate in the interview. Therefore it takes people away

from their current position; not only physically, but emotionally as well. So it has a negative impact on a person's workplace. (Series D, 2004)

4.3.5 Summary of cost comments

Table 19 overviews the cost theme in the research. It shows that, in terms of the cost involved, the selection process for principals in Tasmania was perceived more negatively than positively; an exception to this was a view held by some participants that the process discouraging people from applying for principalship positions may be positive if it 'weeded-out' those people who may not be able to deal with the demands of the position. Of all the comments made about the cost of the process (28), by far the majority (25) were negative.

Table 19: Overview of cost comments

	Negative aspects	Positive aspects
The financial dimension	Insufficiently resourced	
For applicants	Emotional toll	
For panel members	Time involved Stress involved	
For the system as a whole	Discourages people from continuing to apply Discourages people from applying at all Impact on current work	Discourages people from continuing to apply Discourages people from applying at all

4.4 Summary of results

By way of a broad summary (see Tables 20 and 21), the research showed that the process used for the selection of principals in Tasmania was viewed both positively and negatively by participants in the study. This was true across the three themes that emerged from the data collected, effectiveness,

fairness and cost, as well as across the process as a whole, and its component parts.

Table 20 overviews the results found in relation to the effectiveness and fairness of the selection process, while table 21 overviews the results found in relation to the cost.

Table 20: Overview of degree of positive/negative comments on the effectiveness and fairness dimensions

	Application	Interview	Verification elements	Post selection counselling	Process as a whole
Effectiveness	More negative comments than positive	More negative comments than positive	More negative comments than positive for referee reports Equal negative and positive comments for verification of claims and site visits	More negative comments than positive	No positive comments made
Fairness	More negative comments than positive	More positive comments than negative	No comments made	No comments made	More negative comments than positive

Table 21: Overview of degree of positive/negative comments on the cost dimension

The financial dimension	For applicants	For panel members	For the system as a whole
No positive comments made	No positive comments made	No positive comments made	More negative comments than positive

A detailed exploration of the conclusions generated by these findings is contained in the following chapter.

Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This research project set out to explore three research questions:

- what are the views of participants in the principal selection process that exists in the Tasmania Department of Education?
- what effects does participation in the process have on participants themselves?
- what are the implications for the system (Department of Education)?

The views of participants have been described in chapter four, and are summarised in this chapter. The effects of participation in the process have also been described in chapter four – specifically in the section related to the cost of the process; these are also summarised in this chapter. The implications for the system are explored in section 5.2.7 in this chapter.

5.1.1 Themes

As discussed in the previous chapter, and summarised numerically in table 10, three themes emerged within the research findings: effectiveness, fairness and cost. Overall, the predominant view expressed by participants in the research was that the process is not effective, is not fair and is too costly. The themes are discussed below.

5.1.1.1 Effectiveness of the process

Of the three elements described, effectiveness overwhelmingly attracted the most comment. By far the majority of research participants expressed the

view that it was ineffective as a process as a whole (no positive comments), and in all of its component parts. Interestingly though, comments made about the verification elements of the process were almost equal in terms of negatives and positives, revealing that it is the aspect of the selection process that is more positively perceived than any other.

5.1.1.2 Fairness of the process

In considering the fairness of the process, only applications, interviews and the process as a whole were commented upon. No comments were made about verification elements or post-selection counselling. The majority of respondents indicated that they did not perceive the application part of the process, or the process in its totality, as being fair. The comments made about the interview aspect of the selection process were equal in terms of negativity and positivity.

5.1.1.3 Cost of the process

In relation to the cost of the process, the majority of comments were made about the cost to the system, closely followed by the emotional toll that it exerted on applicants. Of all comments made in this section, only one-eighth were positive, and these all related to the viewpoint that discouraging some people from applying for principalship positions may not be entirely negative.

5.1.2 Issues

5.1.2.1 Significant issues

When considered in totality, the issues that were of concern to a majority of research participants were: word limits on applications; the emotional toll on applicants; whose work is it; impacts on performance; issues of consistency;

'weighting' given to parts of the process; veracity of information; timing issues; and skills needed by principals.

5.1.2.2 Issues of concern across a number of components of the process

A number of issues arose consistently across more than one aspect of the selection process (that is, in its entirety or its component parts). These were: issues of consistency; what is being judged; skills needed by principals; whose work is it; veracity of information; the power of the superintendent; and impacts on performance.

5.1.2.3 Issues which attracted a diversity of views

A polarity of views over a number of issues was apparent. In other words, the following issues attracted both negative and positive views: word limits; whose work is it; veracity of information; skills needed by principals; timing issues; issues of consistency; and level of difficulty.

5.1.2.4 Issues which were also identified in other research

As shown in Table 22, a number of issues identified by participants in this research are similar to findings by others researchers. These include: the 'cost' of the process particularly in terms of time (eg: Gourley, Taylor and Doe 2001; Lacey 2002a, 2000b, 2000c, 2004; Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, ACT 2003; Hughes 2004; Barty and Sachs 2004) and emotional toll (eg: Lacey 2002a, 2000b, 2000c, 2004; Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b; Hughes 2004); the perception of a pre-determination of the outcome of positions – this included sub-areas of concern such as the power of the superintendent (eg: Blackmore and Barty 2004; Hughes 2004; Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b; Barty and Sachs 2004), and the power of the 'known' (eg: Blackmore and Barty 2004; Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b), the

process encouraging the portrayal of the 'right' type of applicant and so the tendency to be that person rather than yourself, and that this constituted an unspoken 'formula' of a successful application/interview (eg: Lacey and Gronn 2005b); lack of consistency in both the process itself and decisions made by different panels (eg: Wendel and Breed 1988; White and White 1998; Hawkins 1991; Blackmore and Barty 2004; Lacey and Gronn 2005b), decisions being made on issues not linked to the merit principle (eg: Lacey 2002a, 2002b; Green 2002; Pritchard 2003; Blackmore and Barty 2004; Hughes 2004; Barty and Sachs 2004; Lacey and Gronn 2005b; Brooking 2005), such as the 'how' of an application or interview being influential rather than the 'what'; the over-weighting of the interview part of the process (Hughes 2004; Blackmore and Barty 2004); skills needed by principals; a lack of honesty, and thus validity in various parts of the process (eg: Gourley, Taylor and Doe 2001; Green 2002; Blackmore and Barty 2004; San Diego Schools 2005) including application, interview, referee reports; and concerns over post-selection counselling (eg: Carlin et al 2003; Neidhart and Carlin 2003; Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, ACT 2003; Derous, Born and De Witte 2004; Gilliland 1994, 1995; Lacey and Gronn 2005a, 2005b; Polyhart, Ryan and Bennett 1995; San Diego Schools 2005; Schuler 1993).

5.1.2.5 Issues which were specific to this research

A number of issues that were identified by participants were specific to this study, and have not been noted in other research. These include: word limits in applications; whose work it is that is being presented and therefore measured; timing issues; verification of claims made by applicants; the use of curriculum vitae; level of difficulty; and, the use of pre-prepared responses.

To reiterate, by far the majority of participants in the research expressed the view that the selection process for principals in place in the Tasmanian Department of Education was ineffective, unfair and too costly.

5.1.2.6 Overview of issues

As shown in Figure 1 (in Chapter 2), the review of the literature pertinent to this research revealed that dissatisfaction with principalship selection processes may help to redress the shrinking fields of applicants for positions; this in turn affects the likelihood of ensuring that effective principals are in place to facilitate effective schools. Table 8 provides an overview of exiting research into the areas that are pertinent to this research. This study revealed some similarities with existing research findings, as well as some findings that had not been shown elsewhere. Table 22 provides an overview of the issues raised in this research.

Table 22: Overview of issues identified in this research investigation

	Of concern to the majority of respondents	Of concern across more than one component	Attracted a polarity of views	Identified in other research	Specific to this research
Word limits in applications	√		√		√
Emotional toll on applicants	√			√	
Whose work is it	√	√	√		√
Impacts on performance	√	√		√	
Issues of consistency	√	√	√	√	
Weighting given to parts of the process	√			√	
Veracity of information	√	√	√	√	
Skills needed by principals	√	√	√	√	
What is being judged		√		√	
The power of the superintendent		√		√	
Timing issues		√	√		√
Level of difficulty			√		√
The power of the known				√	
An unspoken 'formula' for success				√	
Merit principle				√	
Verification issues					√
Use of CVs					√
Use of pre-prepared responses					√

5.2 Conclusions

While it is impossible to make broad generalisations based on this small sample, the quality of the responses and the emergence of a number of common concerns expressed by participants provide an indication of the sort

of changes that might be useful in improving these processes, as well as areas for possible future research.

In reviewing the data collected, it is evident that some issues attracted more comment, and so would appear to be of more significant concern than others. This is not to underplay the importance of 'lower incidence' issues, but to provide directions in the priorities for actions.

5.2.1 The issue of word limits

Panels can ask for a specific type of application (500 words, 1000 words etc.) but must consider all applications, whatever format they have been written in. This can be a potential disadvantage to applicants who abided by the requirements and have written 1000 words for example, if they are measured against someone who hasn't and has written 3000 words. (Series B, 2003)

While the particular issue of word limits was one that was specific to this Tasmanian research, it has echoes in the work of other researchers such as Gilliland (1994), who found that applicants are concerned with the procedural justice (i.e. the perceived fairness) of a selection process, and Madigan and Macan (2005), whose study revealed that applicants prefer selection processes which are characterised by, amongst other things, uncertainty reduction.

The issue of word limits was one of considerable concern for respondents for a variety of reasons, including that low word limits made it difficult to write an effective application, that panels convened around the same time asking for different word limits increased the stress on applicants, and that panels had to consider all applications regardless of whether or not people adhered to the word limit.

A clear directive on whether or not word limits are permissible, and, if they are not, how the issue of applications of different lengths being submitted will be dealt with, would help to overcome this area of difficulty.

5.2.2 Information gathering about an applicant's performance

I sometimes look at people who have been promoted who I know are incompetent. When you talk to staff who work with them, you're left wondering how on earth did they dazzle-dazzled a panel, and get promoted at that level, and why is the system allowing this to happen. (Series A, 2003)

A cause of considerable angst for respondents was the perceived reliance on application and interview as the sole determinants of a person's success in the selection process. This appeared in a number of guises – that being able to write and/or speak well are not the only skills needed to be a successful principal, that written and/or verbal articulacy may not be indicative of on-the-job success and that stress may inhibit a person's performance at interview. Verification of claims and site visits were seen as being positive adjuncts to the process, but were seen as not being utilised. This issue became bound up with the notion of time, with comments being made about the lack of time taken to ensure a quality process. These results are in line with the work of other researchers such as Rynes and Connerley (1993), who found that applicants had preferences for selection methodologies which they perceived had a direct link between the methodology being used and the job.

Consideration needs to be given to allowing sufficient time for a panel to broaden the process in terms of how it seeks information about applicants.

5.2.3 The issue of post-selection counselling

... post-selection counselling is a total waste of time because they [panels] had to justify why they gave a person the job. Therefore you went in and would get

slaughtered in some cases, told unbelievable things and you couldn't figure how they got to that conclusion... [I felt] humiliated, sometimes very angry. Sometimes you went out questioning the sanity of the people that had made the decision. (Series D, 2004)

The provision of honest, considerate and understandable post-selection counselling (or, as it is termed elsewhere, performance feedback) is an issue that has appeared in the work of researchers such as Carlin et al (2003); Neidhart and Carlin (2003); Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, ACT (2003); Deros, Born and De Witte (2004); Gilliland (1994, 1995); Lacey and Gronn (2005a, 2005b); Polyhart, Ryan and Bennett (1995); San Diego Schools (2005); and Schuler (1993).

Overall, post-selection counselling was perceived negatively, with a number of respondents expressing the view that it was the part of the process that was the least well done and had considerable negative consequences. Specific information about what constitutes good post-selection counselling, the provision of training for those who provide it, and/or guidelines for its administration would help to correct this situation.

5.2.4 The issue of consistency

The consistency of judgement around applications or lack of is an issue. You can go for one job and get an interview, then go for another job and write virtually the same thing and not get one. You don't know what they want – there's no clear indication of what they are after. (Series D, 2004)

The issue of consistency arose in a variety of permutations: that applications and/or interviews were not judged consistently by different panels, that the verification elements of the process (referee reports, verification of claims, site visits) and post-selection counselling were not being implemented

consistently. These results echo the findings of other researchers, including Derous, Born and De Witte (2004) and Madigan and Macan (2005).

While it may not be possible to reach unanimity of belief on the desirability of consistency across the various elements of the process, or indeed the process as a whole, opening up the discussion may help to alleviate the angst surrounding this issue that this research has uncovered.

5.2.5 Veracity of the process

I think the whole application process is stupid and ridiculous, because I know lots of people who don't write their own applications – have never written their own applications. I know someone who won a principalship recently who didn't write their application. They had only read it once before they even went to the interview. So, what is the point of that? The panel doesn't know whose work it is that you are judging. All people have to do is to go to someone who is an expert at writing and get them to write their applications. I've actually done that for other people. They have come and talked to me like you and I are talking now and then I've gone away and crafted it. I can't see how that is fair. (Series D, 2004)

The validity of some components of the process caused concern for a significant number of respondents. Specifically, these components were: uncertainty over whose work may be being measured in the application and interview components of the process; the difficulty of comparing referee reports because of differences in the language styles of referees; and, the potential unwillingness of referees to be honest about their perceptions. Exploring and developing processes, structures and procedures to help minimise these issues would be beneficial. A process such as the one used in the Little Lake school district in the United States (refer to 2.7.2.1), which incorporates a comprehensive range of selection methodologies may provide

a basis for considering how this can be done by broadening the existing process.

5.2.6 Further research into selection processes

I don't believe that this process is appropriate any longer. The whole role of a principal has changed and the whole selection process needs to change to match that. Being a principal is no longer about what we know; it's about our know-how, our understanding, about how I am as a team player, how I build culture etc, etc. I don't think we can get that across in a forty minute, or even a two hour interview. (Series B, 2003)

A good selection process should be almost a smorgasbord of choices for a panel to be able to use whatever they need to find out as much information about candidates as possible so that they can select the best person for the job. (Series E, 2004)

The Tasmanian principal selection process in recent times has, in theory at least, become somewhat more flexible in terms of how panels are able to design their own individual process. This increased flexibility has seen changes in word limits in applications, the use of CVs and the more conversational style of interview being adopted. However, other potential selection methodologies such as site visits, are not perceived as being utilised.

Undertaking research into selection processes in other contexts may reveal alternative methods of selection that could be incorporated into the current system in Tasmania. These might include a more longitudinal process, such as the one used in Little Lake School District in Los Angeles; the formalised seeking of input from stakeholders, such as is in place in Fairfax County in Florida; and, the more formalised process of supporting potential applicants

for the principalship, as is utilised by the Boston School Leaders Institute in Massachusetts.

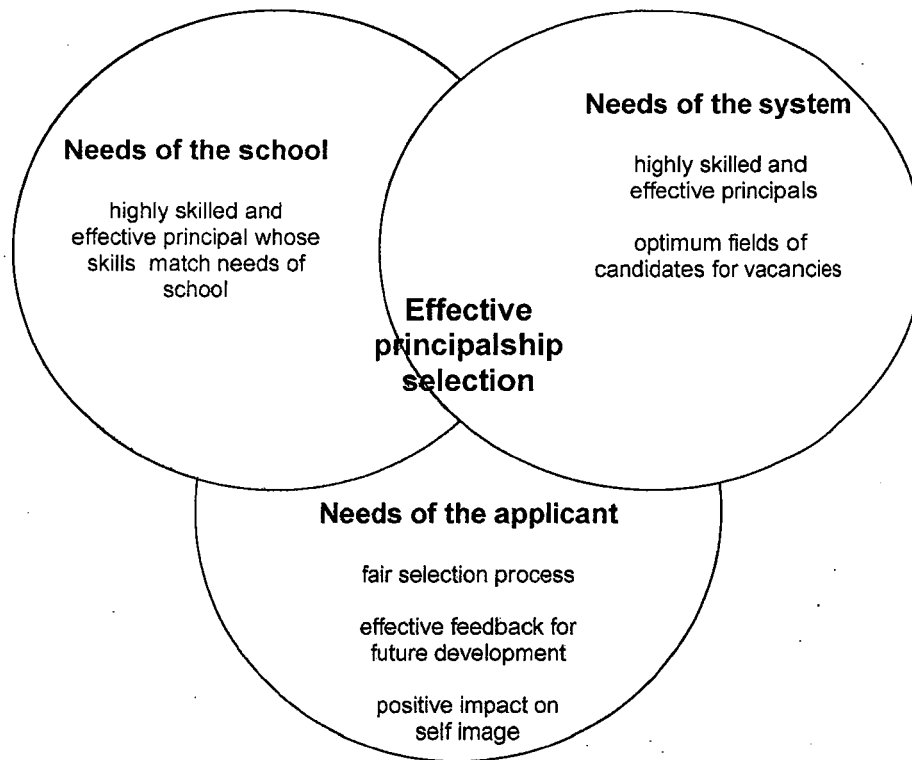
Using the information gathered as a result of these investigations, and encouraging a number of panels to 'think outside the square', giving them the time and other resources needed to implement their process and sharing the reflections of the panel members and applicants on its effectiveness, fairness and cost, would be useful.

5.2.7 A support document

The findings of this research, both where they echoed results of other research investigations and where they were specific to this study, have highlighted a number of elements of good practice in principal selection. While it is imperative that any selection process be flexible enough for panels to design the process in such a way that best fits their needs, a support document which incorporates indicators of best practice may be useful.

Effective principalship selection balances the needs of three main stakeholder groups: the school community, the system (in the Tasmanian context, this is the Department of Education), and the applicants. Figure 2 represents this situation, showing that each stakeholder group impinges on the others.

Figure 2: Elements of effective principalship selection



The suggested support document would be most relevant to the needs of the applicant, since this was the focus of this research, but, in seeking to meet the needs of this stakeholder group, the other two groups also benefit. Elements of such a document might include those shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Support document for selection process

Considerations in designing a selection process

Knowledge about the school:

- seek input about the context and needs of the school from key stakeholders
- use this knowledge to develop ways to explore candidates' capacity to meet these, as well as their merit against the selection criteria
- ensure that potential applicants have knowledge of and access to publicly available documentation about the school

Timing:

- allow enough time to undertake the process thoroughly
- consider timing of interviews – when they occur during the day so that applicants are not disadvantaged by later times

Veracity of information:

- testimonials by others
- selection methodologies related to the range of real-life skills needed to undertake the role
- seeing applicants 'in action'

Panel issues:

- expertise: therefore appropriate training/mentoring is needed
- time spent together prior to selection developing a common view of the characteristics of a successful candidate – possible use of a rubric
- designing the selection process that best facilitates applicants being able to demonstrate merit

Post-selection issues:

- effective post-selection counselling that provides applicants with information to guide future development, and impacts positively on self-image
- use of a feedback loop, which seeks constructive comments from participants about the process itself, to inform future processes

5.2.8 Summary of conclusions

Table 23 overviews the conclusions that have come from this research and suggestions that arise from these.

Table 23: Overview of conclusions

Conclusion	Issue	Suggestion
1	Word limits	Clarification on the issue of the imposition of word limits
2	Information gathering about an applicant's performance	Enable selection panels to have the capacity to undertake this task fully
3	Post-selection counselling	Clarity over what constitutes effective post-selection counselling and appropriate training for panel members
4	Consistency	Discussion around the issue
5	Veracity	Exploration and development of processes which enhance veracity across all elements of the selection process
6	Research into selection processes	Investigation of selection processes in use in other settings; trial of alternative methodologies
7	Support document	Development of a support document which provides suggestions for good practice in principalship selection

5.3 Recommendations for further research

Applying for promotion is just so hard. It gets me down, so for a week or so I don't do my job here at school well because I'm depressed. I go home and I'm grumpy, so my family has a hard time for a while. There have been times in the past when I've lost all my confidence, not believing that I'm any good at the job I'm doing – all of that stuff. (Series C, 2003)

I've seen people who come out virtually quivering messes because of what has happened to them when they have applied for a principalship. (Series D, 2004)

Given the limited nature of the sample (twenty-one respondents), replicating this research into perceptions of the principal selection process in Tasmania on a wider scale, as well as surveying the population based on the results of this research, may be informative. This approach would allow for the robustness of the current data, such as these quotes from respondents which talk about the impact of the current process, to be checked. Do the perceptions expressed by the participants in this research hold true for a wider population of those involved in the Tasmanian principal selection process?

Under the research methodology employed in this study (refer to section 3.5) the roles within the selection process (panel member, panel Chair, applicant) held by interviewees at the time of the research were not incorporated into the analysis of the data. Further research into whether there is any correlation between the role occupied and perceptions of the process might be useful, as might the impact of the outcome of the process (ie: whether or not an applicant was successful), since this was another area that was not covered under the research methodology utilised.

The specific areas identified by points 1-5 in Table 23 (word limits, information gathering about an applicant's performance, post-selection counselling, consistency issues, veracity of information) would be useful areas for specific further investigation.

Another avenue for future research would an exploration of principal selection processes which are deemed effective in meeting the needs of the three stakeholder groups, namely the applicant, the school and the system. A useful focus for this research might be the areas described in Figure 3 (knowledge about the school, timing, veracity of information, panel issues and post-selection counselling issues).

5.4 Final thoughts

In investigating the perceptions of a specific group of people of the principal selection process in Tasmania, the researcher was seeking to answer three specific questions: what are the views of participants in the principal selection process in the Tasmania Department of Education; what effects does participation in the process have on participants themselves, as well as more broadly; and what are the implications for the Tasmanian Department of Education? The views of research participants have been described in Chapter Five, both in terms of their thoughts on the process and its impact on themselves and the Department. The implications for the Department have also been explored in this chapter through suggestions for elements that might be appropriate in a Support Document. Such a document would be useful in providing a starting point for selection panels in their quest to undertake an effective selection process.

Although this research was not focused on declining numbers of applicants for principalship positions, the dissatisfactions with the current selection process that have been uncovered by this research may contribute to such a trend in Tasmania. It is important then, as suggested by Anderson et al. (2004), to listen to the views of participants in the selection process. In this way, we would avoid the situation described by Mulford:

We need to be very careful ... [that] we are not 'eating the seed corn' — consuming our own future — by frightening off the brightest and best from leadership of our schools ... More than ever, we need literate, caring, and critical thinkers in ... leadership positions. (2005:44)

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Appendices

Appendix A: Cover Sheet

Tasmanian State Service Application for Employment

Please complete this form and submit it together with a statement addressing the selection criteria, resume and any other relevant information in support of your application. Visit www.jobs.tas.gov.au or contact the vacancy contact officer for more information.

Vacancy Title

Vacancy No.

Agency/Department

Location

Award

Level

Ms

Miss Mr

Dr Other

Given Name(s)

Family Name

Postal Address

Country

Post Code

Phone Number *

Work ()

Home ()

Mobile

* Please tick preferred contact number

Email

Are you legally entitled to work in Australia?

Type

Expiry Date

Are you currently employed in the Tasmanian State Service?

Yes No

If yes, which Agency?

Employee No.

(on your payslip)

Please provide two referees who are able to comment on your knowledge and skills in relation to the selection criteria

Name

Position

Organisation

Phone Number

Email

Name

Position

Organisation

Phone Number

Email

I understand that providing false information or withholding information relevant to my application for employment in the State Service may result in the withdrawal of an offer of employment or termination of employment.

Signature

Date

//

The State Service encourages and appreciates the benefits of a diverse workforce free from discrimination. If you are selected for an interview, please let the vacancy contact officer know if you require any additional assistance.

The information you provide in this form (including other information provided in support of your application and/or provided by referees) will only be used by persons involved in making determinations about your application. The information may also be used as part of post selection and review processes.

You are entitled at any future time to have access to the information in accordance with parts 2 and 3 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1991*.

Appendix B: Fairfax County Feedback Invitation

Comments Regarding Principal Selection

Fairfax County Public Schools mission is to provide creative, knowledgeable, and talented leadership to ensure student success. To determine the best match for the leadership needs at your school, parent and staff perspectives will be used to screen candidate resumes and develop interview questions.

Principal's responsibilities are divided into the following categories:


- Planning and Assessment
- Instructional Leadership
- Safety and Organizational Management
- Communication and Community Relations
- Professionalism

Please send your input detailing the skills, experiences, and leadership characteristics needed at your school. Include challenges and issues that the new principal will need to address.

Top of Form

Peggy.Dammeye	http://www.fcps		Principal Selectio
---------------	-----------------	--	--------------------

I am a...




parent 

E-mail

Comments regarding
principal selection for

School

Comments



Submit

Bottom of Form

Appendix C: Letter to Potential Applicants

The Best Person for the Job: An investigation into the principal selection process in Tasmanian government schools

Dear Colleague,

My name is Sally Milbourne and, in addition to my role with the Department of Education (Principal, Perth Primary School) I am undertaking a Doctorate of Education research project with the University of Tasmania. The project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for that degree and it has received ethical approval from the University Human Research Ethics Committee as well as from the Department of Education. The research will add to the small body of knowledge that exists about people's perceptions of the Principal selection process in this state and could have implications for future improvements to the process. My supervisor is Dr Heather Smigiel.

As stated above, my research centres around investigating the perceptions of people involved in the Principal selection process in the Tasmanian Department of Education. Therefore, I am seeking to interview people such as yourself who are currently involved in a Principal selection process. There is no payment for being involved in the research. Please note that I am hoping to have people participate in my research regardless of the outcome of their application for the position (i.e. whether or not they are shortlisted for interview). This is important because the input of all applicants from their own personal perspective helps to create a full picture of how people perceive the process.

At this stage, I am not aware of who you are. If you decide to participate in this research, there is a small risk of being identified. However, every effort will be taken to minimise this occurring. If you choose to participate, your anonymity will be safeguarded at all stages of the research – potentially identifiable characteristics such as your name, and the name of the school to which the selection panel relates, will be disguised. Additionally, confidentiality of all participants will be maintained. During the conduct of the research, all documentation will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home. At the conclusion and successful submission of the research, all documentation will be sent to the University, where it will be kept in a secure place for five years, in accordance with University requirements.

The research will take the form of an interview (which I anticipate will take approximately one hour), during which we will explore issues such as your experiences with, and perceptions of the selection process, as well as any other pertinent issues you may wish to explore.

I will be working with several principal selection positions/panels. Your perceptions and the perceptions of other participants will be then written into a dissertation, which will be publicly available.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Should you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice.

If you have any inquiries, you can contact me by phone at home on 63442985, or by email: sally.milbourne@education.tas.gov.au

If you have any concerns of an ethical nature about this research or any complaints about the manner in which the project is conducted, you may contact the Chair of the Northern Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee Dr Roger Fay (6324 3576), or the Executive Officer: Amanda McAully (6226 2763).

If you choose to participate in this research, you will be given copies of the information sheet and statement of informed consent to keep.

My thanks for your consideration of this request, and, if you decide to be involved, your willingness to help to undertake this research.

Whether or not you decide to participate in the research, would you please complete the following form and return it to me as soon as possible. You can email it to me or fax it to me at Perth Primary School.

Yours sincerely,

Sally Milbourne

The Best Person for the Job:
An investigation into the principal selection process in
Tasmanian government schools

I am willing to participate in the research being conducted by Sally Milbourne into the selection processes for principals in Tasmanian government schools.

Name:

.....

School:

.....

Phone:

.....

Email:

.....

OR

I am not willing to participate in the research being conducted by Sally Milbourne into the selection processes for principals in Tasmanian government schools because:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

Statement of informed consent

Title of project:

The Best Person for the Job: An investigation into the principal selection process in Tasmanian government schools

Statement by participant:

1. I have read and understood the 'Information Sheet' for this study.
2. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
3. I understand that the study involves participation in a semi-structured interview, which will focus on my perceptions of the current principal selection process used in the Tasmanian Department of Education. My perceptions and the perceptions of other participants will be then written into a dissertation, which will be publicly available.
4. I understand that all research data will be treated as confidential.
5. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
6. I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a subject.
7. I agree to participate in this investigation and understand that I may withdraw at any time without prejudice.

Name of participant:

Signature:

Date:

Statement by the investigator:

I have explained this project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

Name of investigator:

Signature:
.....

Date:

Appendix E: Version of promotion application with names of verifiers

APPENDIX 2.33

Human Resources Handbook September 2001 Update
Tasmania Department of Education

Information to applicants

The format shown on the following page should be used for each criterion. As the written application must be of 3000 words or less, it is anticipated that approximately two-pages for each criterion will form a 'standard' application. This is not prescriptive, however, and applicants may wish to provide more information in some criteria than others.

Instructions

1. Applicants should fill in the heading section by writing in the criterion number and description.
2. In part A, it is intended that applicants use this section to demonstrate their knowledge and capacity with respect to this criterion. It is likely that this section be in narrative style, but the format is left to the applicant.
3. In part B, it is intended that applicants list one or more tasks, activities or roles that demonstrate their skills and experience to undertake activities specified by the criterion. ***It is likely that this section would be in 'dot point' form.***
4. In part B, for each task/activity/role listed, the applicant must specify a referee, and his or her contact details, who is able to verify the claim through direct knowledge. ***This referee may be contacted to verify your claim.***
5. Applicants are advised to use an electronic version of the proforma so that they can ensure each section can be expanded or contracted to 'fit' their application.

Promoted Position Application Proforma (Teaching Service Positions)

(See Part 2.9)

APPENDIX 2.33

Human Resources Handbook February 2001 Update

Criterion

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Part A Introduction.

.....
.....

Verified by
Referee for task/activity/role 1

(Please specify name and contact details.)

[illegible]

Verified by
Referee for task/activity/role 2

(Please specify name and contact details.)

[illegible]

Appendix F: Guidelines for applicants for promotion positions (Tasmanian Department of Education)

Table of Contents

(December 2003)

<u>Advice to Potential Applicants</u>	1
<u>Citizenship Requirements</u>	1
<u>Essential and Desirable Requirements for Positions</u>	1
<u>Merit Selection</u>	2
<u>Vacancy Advertisements</u>	2
<u>Selection Criteria</u>	2
<u>Applying for Positions</u>	3
<u>Acknowledgement of Your Application</u>	3
<u>Selection Panels</u>	3
<u>Verification of Claims</u>	4
<u>Interviews</u>	4
<u>Selection Panel Report</u>	5
<u>Post-Selection Counselling</u>	5
<u>Reviews</u>	5
<u>Before Lodging Your Application</u>	6
<u>Contact Details</u>	6

Advice to Potential Applicants

(December 2003)

When considering applying for a position with the Department of Education, Tasmania it is important for you to read these guidelines.

The guidelines are designed not only to ensure that statutory requirements are met, but also that sound human resource management practices are followed during the staff selection process. This in turn will mean that informed decisions can be made, making sure that the best person is selected for each job.

[Contents](#)

Citizenship Requirements

(December 2003)

To be eligible for appointment as a permanent employee in the Department of Education Tasmania, a person must either be an Australian citizen or a permanent resident of Australia. People who are not Australian citizens or permanent residents can be employed in a fixed-term capacity subject to the requirements of the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (see: <http://www.immi.gov.au/>) and the *Migration Act 1958*.

[Contents](#)

Essential and Desirable Requirements for Positions

(July 2004)

Statements of duties and advertisements include the essential requirements for the position.

While you need not possess the desirable requirements for a position, you must meet the essential requirements to be appointed or promoted to a position.

All occupants of school-based positions, or occupants of positions who are required to undertake duties in schools, must satisfy the requirements of a Good Character check, including a record of conviction check with Tasmania Police.

(see: http://www.education.tas.gov.au/dept/employment/applying_for_a_job/employment_pre-requisites/goodcharacter)

All teachers employed by the Department of Education, Tasmania must have been granted registration, provisional registration or a limited authority to teach, by the Teachers Registration Board **before** they can be employed to undertake teaching duties. This applies to all teachers, including fixed-term, relief, permanent, full-time and part-time teachers.

The Teachers Registration Board is happy to answer any queries you may have in relation to teacher registration. The Board is located on Level 4 of Kirksway House, 2 Kirksway Place, Battery Point and can be contacted by e-mail at TRB.admin@education.tas.gov.au or by telephone on ☎ (03) 6233

5992 or by fax on 6233 2549. Information and assistance can also be obtained from the Teachers Registration Board website at:
<http://trb.tas.gov.au>

In the first instance, if you have any queries as to whether your qualifications and skills meet the essential requirements, you should talk to the contact officer named in the advertisement for the position.

[Contents](#)

Merit Selection

(December 2003)

All positions in the Tasmanian State Service are filled on the basis of merit.

Put simply, merit selection is designed to ensure that any appointment to, or promotion within the State Service is made on the basis of the capacity of the person to do the job. It is designed to prevent appointments or promotions being made on discriminatory grounds such as nepotism, patronage, favouritism or discrimination.

Section 7 of the *State Service Act 2000* provides that the "Service is a public service in which employment decisions are based on merit" and that a decision relating to appointment or promotion is based on merit if:

- an assessment is made of the relative suitability of the candidates for the duties; and
- the assessment is based on the relationship between the candidates' work-related qualities and the work-related qualities generally requested for the duties; and
- the assessment focuses on the relative capacity of the candidates to achieve outcomes related to the duties; and
- the assessment is the primary consideration in making the decision.

[Contents](#)

Vacancy Advertisements

(February 2004)

All permanent vacancies and fixed-term vacancies in excess of twelve months are advertised in the State Services Notices Section of the Tasmanian Government Gazette, the Careers section in the State Government website (see: <http://www.jobs.tas.gov.au>) and occasionally in newspapers or specialist publications.

Fixed-term vacancies of less than twelve months are circulated as Expressions of Interest on the Corporate Services communication within the Department.

All advertisements contain the name of a contact officer who can provide copies of the statement of duties, local task list (if applicable) and more

information about the position. Before preparing your application you should discuss the requirements of the advertised position with the contact officer, even if you think you know all there is to know about the position. You may also wish to discuss other matters such as background information on the position, organisational structure, conditions of employment and so on.

[Contents](#)

Selection Criteria

(December 2003)

Selection criteria are contained in the Statement of Duties. Your application will be assessed against these criteria and other requirements of the position. Your application must address the selection criteria in accordance with requirements specified in the vacancy advertisement.

[Contents](#)

Applying for Positions

(December 2003)

Your written application is the first contact between you and the selection panel. It is the mechanism by which you can indicate to the selection panel how your qualities match those genuinely required for the vacancy. It is imperative therefore that your application best represents your claims for the position.

The advertisement for the vacancy will state the preferred format for application that has been determined by the selection panel.

For all positions a standard Form 201 "Application for Employment", available at <http://www.jobs.tas.gov.au/appkit/forms/form201.pdf>, must be attached to your application.

This form requests important information about applicants for positions in the State Service and should be filled out carefully and accurately. Make sure all the details about your current position and the one you are applying for are correct.

[Contents](#)

Acknowledgement of Your Application

(January 2005)

Human Resources Management Branch (Staffing and Establishment Services) acknowledge all applications for positions. Receipt of written acknowledgement is verification that your application has been received and forwarded to the relevant selection panel. If you do not receive an acknowledgement within five working days of the closing date of the position you should contact Staffing and Establishment Services on one of the following telephone numbers ☎ (03) 6233 7251 or ☎ (03) 6233 7101 or via e-mail: Recruitment@education.tas.gov.au

[Contents](#)

Selection Panels

(February 2004)

The role of the selection panel is to make a balanced judgement on the relative merit of the applicants in respect of the selection criteria for the position and to convey its recommendations to the Secretary of the Department (or his delegate) for final decision.

When making a judgement, the selection panel will usually consider:

- written applications;
- interview performance; and
- referee reports or other means of claim verification.

Other selection processes such as written exercises, presentations or assessment tools may also be used.

All components of the selection process are important in assisting the panel to make a judgement of merit.

[Contents](#)

Verification of Claims

(December 2003)

Panels will consider a range of processes to verify information identified in applications.

These may include:

- Requesting additional information, documentation and/or other evidence from the applicant.
- Seeking referee reports.
- Contacting people other than cited referees. These may include the applicant's line managers or direct supervisors. In this case information gained should also be made available to the applicant.
- Visiting an applicant's work site to seek verification of aspects of their application. Such visits may include discussions with the applicant's supervisors, peers, students and representatives of the parent community or observation of the applicant's work. The panel may also wish to gain first hand knowledge of a particular program or project cited in the application.

Referee reports can be a particularly important part of the selection process.

You must nominate two referees in support of your application. They must be able to comment on your work performance and one of them should be a current or recent work supervisor or someone well qualified to comment on your capacity to fill the position you are applying for. You will need to supply

each referee's name, position and contact telephone number during business hours.

It is important to ask your referees first if they will supply a referee report for you. You should also give your referees a copy of the statement of duties for the position you are applying for.

[Contents](#)

Interviews

(February 2004)

Not all applicants will necessarily be interviewed, even if they are currently employed in the Department. Usually only those applicants who can demonstrate their ability to meet the selection criteria to a high degree will be interviewed. If you are shortlisted for interview you will be advised of the date, time, venue and format of the interview at least two working days prior to the interview. Make sure that you arrive on time and are well prepared.

The interview will centre on issues related to the selection criteria and the demands of the position and will allow the panel to obtain further information on your claims for the position.

You should also use the interview situation to clarify your understanding of the position. If there is something you are unclear about, ask the panel for more information. Similarly, if you are not sure what the panel means by a particular question, ask for clarification. It is important that you understand the question so that you can provide the best possible response.

[Contents](#)

Selection Panel Report

(February 2004)

When the selection process has been completed the panel will prepare a report for the Secretary or his delegate for approval.

This report will include details of the selection process undertaken and a statement outlining who has been nominated for the position. The report will also contain a statement comparing the merit of the nominated applicant to that of other applicants. Applicants do not receive a copy of this report or the comparative statement. When the report has been approved all applicants will be notified in writing of the decision and advised in relation to reviews.

[Contents](#)

Post-Selection Counselling

(December 2003)

Post-selection counselling provides a constructive opportunity to discuss your performance in the selection process as well as your strengths and weaknesses in terms of the selection criteria. Post-selection counselling may also help in planning the type of training and development that you would like to undertake in preparation for seeking promotion at a future time.

At least one member of the selection panel, usually the convenor, will be available for post-selection counselling. A copy of your individual assessment will be provided at this time.

A dot point summary of the major issues covered during the counselling will be kept by the person providing the counselling as it may be required for review purposes.

Further information on the post-selection counselling process may be obtained from the Office of the State Service Commissioner (see:

<http://www.osscc.tas.gov.au/review/pscounselling.pdf>)

[Contents](#)

Reviews

(December 2003)

Unsuccessful applicants who are State Service employees may make application to the State Service Commissioner for a review, in accordance with the Commissioner's Directions, of the selection process and/or decision.

Unsuccessful applicants considering a review should request post-selection counselling before making a decision on proceeding with a request for a review.

Further information on the review process may be obtained from the Office of the State Service Commissioner (see: <http://www.osscc.tas.gov.au/review/>).

If the review is successful, the employee who lodged the application for review will not automatically be selected for the position. Instead, the Department will be required to undertake the selection process again.

[Contents](#)

Before Lodging Your Application

(January 2005)

Check that you have:

- Completed an Application for Employment Form 201.
- Signed and proof read your application to check for accuracy of information and grammatical and spelling errors.
- Stapled all documents together in the top left-hand corner. Please do not bind or use a presentation folder when forwarding your application.
- Attached copies of qualifications. If you are already employed in the Department of Education, you will not need to provide copies of your qualifications or certificates.
- Provided details of two referees.

- Addressed your application envelope correctly and marked it 'Private and Confidential'.

Applications should be lodged by the closing date indicated in the advertisement to:

Human Resources Management Branch (Staffing and Establishment Services)
Department of Education
GPO Box 169
Hobart TAS 7001

or

116 Bathurst Street
Hobart TAS 7000

or

E-mail* Recruitment@education.tas.gov.au

*Please note: If e-mailing your applications a signed original must also be forwarded by mail.

Late applications are rarely accepted and then only at the discretion of the Director (Human Resources Management). It is your responsibility to ensure that applications reach Human Resources Management Branch (Staffing and Establishment Services) by the specified closing date.

[Contents](#)

Contact Details

(January 2005)

If you have any questions about information contained in these guidelines you should contact Staffing and Establishment Services on ☎ (03) 6233 7251 or ☎ (03) 6233 7101 or via e-mail: Recruitment@education.tas.gov.au